

# Old Friends and New Horizons: Recalibrating American and French Indo-Pacific Strategy

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HARVARD Kennedy School  
**BELFER CENTER**  
for Science and International Affairs

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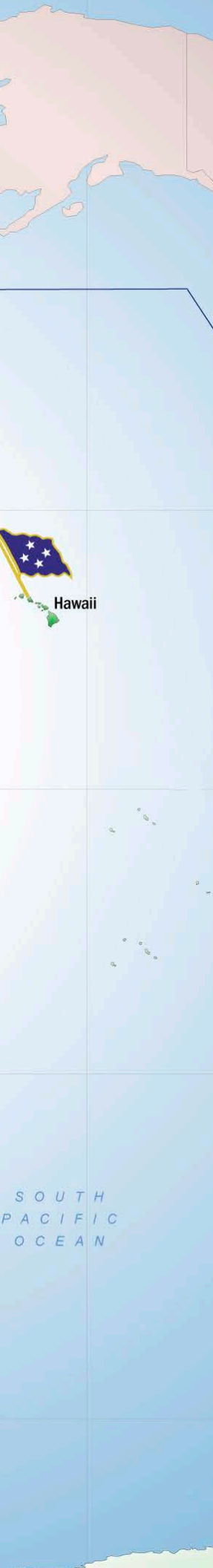


# Executive Summary

France and the United States are the two Western countries with the highest sovereign interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Ensuring sovereign integrity and the security of their citizens are the first strategic priority of both nations. Furthermore, as longtime allies, Washington and Paris share mutually supporting interests that align their geopolitical security within the diplomatic, economic, and military spheres. Traditionally thought of as national interests, many now transcend borders to reflect inclusive interests of both Washington and Paris versus the exclusivity of a single nation-state. There is an increasingly common strategic vision that can bolster regional security by developing physical and digital connectivity to ensure a free, safe, and open Indo-Pacific.

Shared strategic vision requires apt diagnosis of the state of play before consideration of potential policy prescriptions that might strengthen a unified approach to the Indo-Pacific. Foundational bedrock interests provide underlying structure and focus for both states. Strategists in Washington and Paris must continue to focus on first-level interests including maintaining productive relations with regional great powers to manage crisis and stave off any great power conflict, ensure the survival and active cooperation of key regional allies, and protect the viability and stability of major global systems including trade, financial markets, and energy. Second-level interests hold areas where there may be less consensus on the ways and means but implicit agreement on the nexus of interests and values: preventing, deterring, and reducing the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons anywhere and preventing regional proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, safeguarding of democracy at home and around the world has increasingly become one of the highest second-level interests and might now be regarded as vital in what some have called a renewed competition between democracy and authoritarianism.

Addressing human rights violations, preventing genocide, suppressing terrorism, constraining the emergence of regional hegemony, and promoting international policies to mitigate climate change further align priorities.



Washington and Paris can maximize positive outcomes and improve Indo-Pacific stability by reinforcing each other in the region. The United States remains highly focused on security with a large military component, strong historical alliances, and economic resources. France also has a sizeable military presence, maintains a geopolitical stature based on its vast territories, exclusive economic zone rights, and a unique position of influence within the European Union (EU) that can be leveraged to bring like-minded members to the table. With the diplomatic, economic, and military power of the United States and EU all focused on creating a free and open Indo-Pacific that complements the current international order, France and the United States can work more effectively together. Nonetheless, most Indo-Pacific nations face the terrible conundrum of having their security ensured by the greatest competitor of their economic guarantor and geographic neighbor. Favoring one alienates the other, breaching either the sense of safety or the prospect of livelihood. In this highly bipolar regional environment, France seeks to rally the EU to offer an alternative, convening model. Hence, the best yield for the United States might be achieved by leveraging an offset approach through France or the EU, thus offering a more “positive framing,” thereby mitigating the reactive devaluation effect and the associated pushback. Conversely, Paris and Brussels would feel better supported by the might of Washington’s diplomatic and military power when core interests or values are in peril.

The greatest challenge to shared prosperity remains an increasingly aggressive Chinese foreign policy. Beijing has assertively advanced their security interests in the region through the militarization of the South China Sea, border disputes, rebuffed on the “One China, Two Systems” with Hong Kong, and increased pressure on Taiwan through military exercises, crossing into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone numerous times. China is launching a third strategy of displacement, one that *expands* blunting and building efforts worldwide to displace the United States as the global leader. The Global China Initiative laid out by Beijing suggests China intends to become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence, construct a ‘world-class army,’ be actively involved in ‘global governance,’ and foster ‘a new type of international relations and build a community with a shared future for mankind. China altered their foreign policy strategy to encompass “peripheral diplomacy,”

recognizing the importance of the region in bolstering their economic development and regional influence.

In the heterotopian gray-zone struggle between authoritarianism and democracy, this stratagem of choice is reflected by Beijing in all their levers of statecraft. From diplomacy to trade and military incentivized cooperation, there are a wide array of tactics designed to exploit behavioral, cultural, and political biases and weaknesses. Naval coercion, information warfare, sovereign debt traps, currency manipulation, political meddling, lawfare, and other approaches shape outcomes favorable to China over time. Revisionist, yet incremental. Strategic in its ends, but peripheral in its means. Coercive, but not escalatory. Bluntly attributable, although officially deniable. Subversive, however conscious of adversarial interests. Manipulative, but empathetic and coordinated.

To reach their goal of national rejuvenation and the “Chinese Dream” by redefining the international order, China must first establish themselves as the regional hegemon and are thus focused on an expansionist agenda in East Asia. If China is moderately successful in this endeavor or pushes the United States and France further afield while breaking down other regional alliances, this would result in a dramatic shift in the balance of power and threaten the shared prosperity all the Indo-Pacific has enjoyed over the last decades.

To counter and balance these efforts, the United States, France, and the EU can better support Indo-Pacific allies in ways that underscore a shared strategic vision: collaboration, coordination, and consultation. The following recommendations reflect three distinct approaches, yet each build upon a framework in the pursuit of tangible interests driven by common values.

## **Collaboration: Positive-Sum Outputs**

- Strongly consider U.S. ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to guarantee unambiguous cooperation in defending freedom of navigation and maritime sovereignty against the many efforts of Chinese incremental annexation.

- Terrorism, non-proliferation, climate change, environmental protection, humanitarian assistance, pandemic and disaster relief, health, common goods, and sustainable governance can and should all be addressed jointly for positive-sum outcomes.
- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) holds a central position for both the United States and France in the Indo-Pacific. France, the EU, and the United States should closely collaborate in all efforts aiming to secure resilient regional economies, diverse value chains, human and infrastructure connectivity, and jointly developed regulations.
- U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC)<sup>1</sup> offers the ideal forum for collaborative actions to be developed further and should be consistently leveraged by both the United States and the EU. Presidents Biden and Macron defined the TTC as the “forum for enabling the United States and the EU to update the rules of the road for the 21st Century economy.”<sup>2</sup>
- A new and expanded Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would represent the world’s largest trade agreement, not only offering considerable economic benefits, but also creating great geostrategic leverage, thereby strongly inducing China to comply with fair and sustainable international norms.
- Continued implementation and expansion of the 40 trillion USD “Build Back Better World” (B3W)<sup>3</sup> and the EU’s 300 billion USD “Global Gateway” projects provide credible and attractive alternatives to China’s BRI and its debt-trap diplomacy.
- The United States and France should maximize the habits of security cooperation and interoperability principally in the Western Pacific and Eastern Indian Ocean. Secondarily, an increased French presence in the Northwestern Pacific, a greater U.S. presence in the South Pacific, and closer coordination of activity in each area.<sup>4</sup>

1 “U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC),” *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-eu-trade-and-technology-council-ttc/>.

2 “United States-France Joint Statement,” The White House, October 29, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/29/united-states-france-joint-statement/>.

3 “FACT SHEET: President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership,” The White House, June 12, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/>.

4 Walter Lohman, “The U.S. and France Should Double Down on Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” The Heritage Foundation, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/the-us-and-france-should-double-down-security-cooperation-the-indo-pacific>.

- Regional military collaboration should cover not only contingency, but also military operations other than war, such as humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR), information and intelligence sharing, and more transparent communication on operations, intentions, and threats increases interoperability and security.
- Enhance the interagency Lafayette Committee to expand information and intelligence sharing across all levels: tactical, operational, and strategic.

## **Coordination: Zero-Sum Outputs**

- On some issues outright French-U.S. collaboration is detrimental. Separation in nominal branding, despite commonness of goals, allows for the creation of greater terminal utility. This process is nonetheless costly in both time and resources, mandating a great amount of close coordination and an offset leveraging of complementary strengths.
- Coordination should occur from the onset of all and any bilateral or regional agreements. This includes broadening the regional ties of the Quad, bilateral cooperation with major partners such as India, Japan, Australia, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines or Malaysia, partnering with Pacific Island states, implementing regional initiatives, or meaningfully strengthening the diplomatic presence in the region. Direct engagement with China by the United States, France, or the EU will achieve greater efficiency when coordinated in practice.
- The best yield for the United States can be achieved by leveraging an offset approach through France or the EU, thus offering a more “positive framing” and minimizing the reactive devaluation effect. Track two diplomacy can diffuse tensions and reduce pushback.
- Extensive coordination on divergent regulatory issues such as technology, data, privacy, and labor. These measures of coordination also need to be extended to more “tactical” issues, such as the protection of American and European domestic industrial interests or the perceived mutually exclusive provision of capital and technology to China.
- First collaborate in multilateral military exercises, training, and operations, but also coordinate their presence throughout the region to enhance security more broadly.

## Consultation: Positive Output Despite Disagreement

- The greatest policy rifts between France and the United States appear in the prospective use of power, both in the realms of security and trade disputes have now been settled, but they have shown a weakness in the alliance, recurrently owed to competition.
- The United States, France, and other allies in the region should work to establish clear redlines or rules of engagement for waging security competition. Friends and allies should systematically maintain effective channels of communication, refraining from implementing any bilateral or regional action without prior consultations. The latter can be conducted openly through the existing diplomatic, trade, and military channels but can also be usefully delegated to the existing intelligence dialogs. These discreet forums allow for greater flexibility, jointly managing the process, stakeholders, desired end-state, and each side's public opinions
- Allied countries must consult to shape and set the factful narrative for all parties. Information and intelligence sharing between France, the United States, and other Quad countries must occur more frequently to make this happen.<sup>5</sup> The United States and France should not only share information and intelligence, but they should also work to increase international awareness of China's coercive actions and the long-term effects

To maintain a balance-of-power across the Indo-Pacific in defense of American and French interests alongside those of regional allies, both Paris and Washington must leverage their greatest strengths in a concert of shared application. All actions in the diplomatic, economic, security, and informational realms should fall under one of three processes: collaboration, coordination, or consultation. Collaboration should allow to aggregate all positive-sum actions that are at no risk of inefficiency by outrightly antagonizing China. Coordination must be exercised for all zero-sum actions, where the often-complementary stance, assets and acceptance of the United States, the EU, and France can be mutually leveraged for greater final value. Consultation must prevail in those few issues where a common position cannot be agreed on, to avoid undermining

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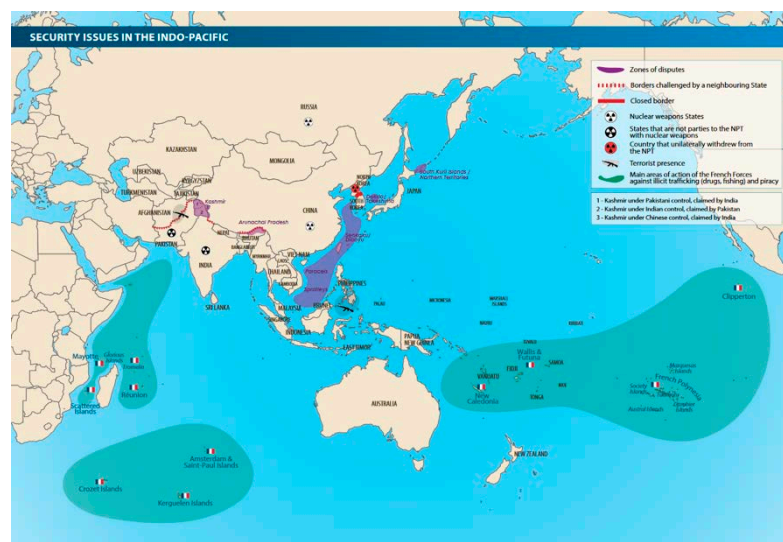
5 Garima Mohan, "Europe in the Indo-Pacific: A Case for More Coordination with Quad Countries," The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 14 January 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/europe-indo-pacific-case-more-coordination-quad-countries>.

partners' locally divergent agendas, and to preserve the indispensable notions of common unity and resolve.

## Introduction

Ask anyone which western nation has the highest stakes in the Indo-Pacific, and you're most likely to hear the same answer: the United States. Many world-defining events heavily link this region and the United States in what Carl Jung would dub the "collective unconscious": the attack on Pearl Harbor, the first and only use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the wars in Vietnam and Korea. The Indo-Pacific Anglo-Saxon footprint is further reinforced by the legacy of the British Empire. Australia, India, and the Commonwealth of Nations may no longer represent the largest empire in the history of civilization, yet bygone days echo through time and many observers inescapably link the present to past engagements. More recently, the growing rivalry between Beijing and Washington illustrates the leading idea of a strategic duopoly whenever there is a discussion on the Indo-Pacific's future. This research argues the common narrative too frequently overlooks another western nation of the Indo-Pacific. In fact, if the stakes were to be measured, this *other nation* is the owner of the greatest western equities in the region: America's oldest ally.

Figure 1





Little is it known that the world's second-largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) belongs to France. Even less known because of its numerous overseas territories. Indeed, 93% of the French EEZ is in the Indo-Pacific. French territorial equities span from the African Coast (La Reunion, Mayotte) all the way to Mexico (Clipperton), with the largest EEZs being around the Sub-Antarctic Territories of Kerguelen, Crozet, Amsterdam & Saint-Paul, and French Polynesia. This not only makes France the only European country with a substantive regional presence, but also the only country in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, from the human perspective, the region is home to two million French citizens and 8,000 military personnel. It therefore hosts three percent of the French population *and* represents the largest French overseas military presence, straddling both the Indian and the Pacific oceans.

The importance of French equities in the Indo-Pacific makes it an essential actor of what the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs named “the World’s strategic center of gravity.”<sup>7</sup> And yet, France is not mentioned a single time in the U.S. Department of State’s Indo-Pacific Strategy.<sup>8</sup> If the preeminent department responsible for shaping American foreign policy does not include France in their principal strategy for the Indo-Pacific, it suggests a view that France is deemed less consequential for U.S. strategy *or* there is a gap in understanding these dynamics. The considerable resources of the United States make this less surprising given the bulk of priorities, budgets, and resources are dedicated to the Department of Defense (DOD). The strong position held in the region by the United States in the “*collective unconscious*” is starkly backed up by mind-boggling figures.

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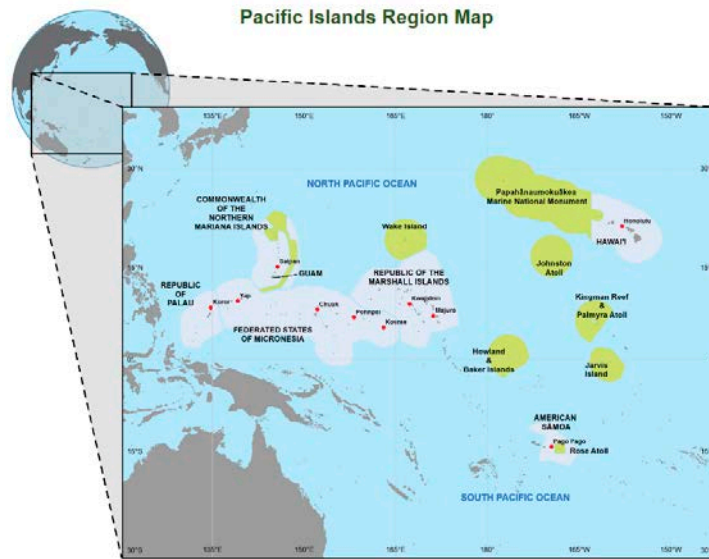
6 Pending the evolution of the legal sovereignty of the Chagos Islands.

7 Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères. “France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy 2022.” February 2022. [Diplomatie.gouv.fr. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en\\_dcp\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_022022\\_v1-4\\_web\\_cle878143.pdf.](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf)

8 “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision,” Department of State, November 4, 2019, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf.](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf)



Figure 2<sup>9</sup>



The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) is the largest of all six U.S. Combatant Commands. Under its authority serve 375,000 civilian and military personnel, manning over 1,100 aircraft, 200 ships and five carrier strike groups.<sup>10</sup> The American territorial equities, although solely located in the Pacific Ocean, span a full ranging arc from Guam to Hawaii. Moreover, military basing rights in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and Diego Garcia allow the United States to maintain a geographically comprehensive and militarily dominating presence in the Indo-Pacific.

As history reminds us, the challenges of the Indo-Pacific are too immense for any single western nation to manage on their own. Security conditions require steadfast regional partners and shared strategic approaches between the two western countries with the highest sovereign interests in the region. Progress begins with a clear-eyed view of the interests at stake followed by consideration of shared priorities and complementary approaches. For America and the West, there is no greater military capability in all the Indo-Pacific. On the part of France, therein lies an opportunity to balance American military strength with robust and more consensual diplomatic, economic, and territorial contributions. How Washington and Paris now engage and leverage each other's respective strengths will play a defining role in the years ahead.

9 USGCRP, "Fourth National Climate Assessment" (U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, 2018), <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov><https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/27>.

10 "About United States Indo-Pacific Command," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/>.



# 1. Part I: The US & France in the Indo-Pacific

## 1.1. The Indo-Pacific State of Play: Interests and Challenges

### Interests

France and the United States are the two Western countries with the highest sovereign interests in the Indo-Pacific. Ensuring sovereign integrity and the security of their citizens are the first strategic priority of both nations. Furthermore, as longtime allies, Washington and Paris share mutually supporting interests that align their geopolitical security within the diplomatic, economic, and military spheres. Traditionally thought of as national interests, many now transcend borders to reflect inclusive interests of Washington and Paris versus the exclusivity of a single nation-state. For example, in the majority of first order issues each share common views on maintaining productive relations with regional great powers to manage crisis and stave off any great power conflict, ensuring the survival and active cooperation of key regional allies, and the viability and stability of major global systems including trade, financial markets, and energy. Such first-level interests remain existential for survival and largely drive strategic approaches.

Second-level interests find more common ground. Preventing, deterring, and reducing the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons anywhere are bedrocks of western strategy. Preventing regional proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is as true in the Indo-Pacific as the Middle East. France is a leader in promoting the acceptance of international rules of law through the shrewd use of diplomatic instruments. Each rightly encourages the promotion of freedom, democracy, prosperity, and the well-being of current allies, potential ones, and people living under conditions deemed less than free.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the safeguarding of democracy at home and around the world has increasingly become one of the highest second-level interests

<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2022: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule," <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2022/global-expansion-authoritarian-rule>.

and might now be regarded as vital in what some have called a renewed competition between democracy and authoritarianism. Addressing human rights violations, preventing genocide, suppressing terrorism, preventing or constraining the emergence of regional hegemony, and promoting international policies to mitigate climate change shape evolving national policies of both countries.

These foundational, bedrock interests provide underlying structure and focus for both states. Though each state may not necessarily hold the same exact view or priority for each issue, these interests reflect the general views between the United States and France, but so too the wider western world. The greater question and one that draws finer lines of distinction is not so much *what matters* but the *ways and means* for pursuing such interests. All are at play within the Indo-Pacific in the form of disparate challenges, both state and non-state, regional and functional. Each fall within the workshop of statecraft be they diplomatic, military, or economic.

As stated in the French Indo-Pacific Strategy, “while several open crises persist and new rivalries emerge, the breakdown of strategic stability or a lasting deterioration in the regional security environment, would have an immediate impact on political, economic and sovereign interests.”<sup>2</sup> This naturally refers to great power competition, but also to more volatile issues such as transnational terrorism, piracy, and uncontrolled proliferation. Such challenges merit reflection for apt diagnosis of the state of play before consideration of potential policy prescriptions that might strengthen a unified approach to engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

## Challenges

The vanguard security imperatives in the Indo-Pacific bear quite differently on France and the United States. Where the former’s priority lies in the defense of its sovereign equities, the latter’s focus is on maintaining a strong and deterrent military presence, allowing to uphold a favorable balance of power on its Western flank. Although paramount to both France and the United States, security is not the sole concern both Nations share

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2 Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères. “France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy 2022.” February 2022. [Diplomatie.gouv.fr. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en\\_dcp\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_022022\\_v1-4\\_web\\_cle878143.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf)

in the Indo-Pacific. They are also dedicated to safeguarding their diplomatic and economic interests.

### *Diplomatic*

Over the past three years, strategic competition has shifted U.S. security focus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific. As stated in the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy, “long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department, and require both increased and sustained investment, because of the magnitude of the threats they pose to U.S. security and prosperity today, and the potential for those threats to increase in the future.”<sup>3</sup> China’s unilateral drive to redefine the balance of power causes strategic conflict between the United States and People’s Republic of China (PRC), which France calls a “structural impact,” making the “regional security equation more complex.”<sup>4</sup>

Maintaining free and open access to the commons thus becomes a security, economic, and diplomatic concern for both France and the United States. As such, it is listed as a priority both in France’s Indo-Pacific strategy and in President Biden’s Interim National Security Strategic Guidance. Both Nations underscore that an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific can only be achieved by strict abidance to the rule of international law and the firm rejection of coercion. During a speech in Jakarta’s Universitas Indonesia, on 14 December 2021, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken defined the U.S. notion of freedom and openness for the region: *“When we say that we want a free and open Indo-Pacific, we mean that on an individual level, that people will be free in their daily lives and live in open societies. We mean that on a state level, that individual countries will be able to choose their own path and their own partners. And we mean that on a regional level, that in this part of the world problems will be dealt with openly, rules will be reached transparently and applied fairly, goods and ideas and people will flow freely across land,*

3 “Mattis—Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy.Pdf,” accessed December 15, 2021, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

4 Ministère des Armées. France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific. 2019. <https://www.archives.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/559608/9684004/file/France's%20Defence%20Strategy%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific%20-%202019.pdf>

*cyberspace, and the open seas. We all have a stake in ensuring that the world's most dynamic region is free from coercion and accessible to all.*"<sup>5</sup>

Only a month earlier, also in Jakarta, the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs highlighted the very same diplomatic objective: *"What is at stake in this world region—of which I repeat we are an integral part [...] are the major strategic and geopolitical balances of tomorrow's world. What is at stake here is the face of the global economy of the 21st-century as the Indo-Pacific will concentrate 60% global GDP by 2030 and already represents 3/5 of the earth's population. What is at stake here is our collective ability to preserve our common goods, starting with the planet. What is at stake here is the force and effectiveness of international law—particularly the law of the sea. What is at stake here is the possibility of inventing together a sustainable development model that is a genuine model of human progress. One that is at the same time a model that fights inequalities and a model that promotes freedom. For it would be false to imagine that one is possible without the other, as history has shown. Lastly, what is at stake here is the very credibility of multi-nationalism as a method for a collective action to address the major challenges we all face. In short, everything that happens in the Pacific now has global importance. That, the Europeans cannot ignore and that is what France has constantly told its European partners in recent years."*<sup>6</sup>

The Indo-Pacific has thus become a paramount diplomatic challenge, as much as it has become a foreign policy buzzword. Buzzwords, however, often conceal different priorities and different meanings. For France, the underlying stakes behind the notion are territorial equities. As such, the "French Indo-Pacific" stretches from the Eastern coast of Africa all the way to the Western coasts of Mexico, while also reaching South to the strategic coasts of Antarctica. For the United States, however, the notion is shaped rather by its security strategy and unity of military command. Pursuant to INDOPACOM's area of responsibility, the "American Indo-Pacific" is affirmed as "spanning a vast stretch of the globe from the West coast of the

5 "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific," *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific/>. <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific/>.

6 CSIS Indonesia, *CSIS Lecture Series on Regional Dynamics: French Strategy on Indo-Pacific*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I87IseINvFc>.

United States to the Western shores of India.”<sup>7</sup> This definition also clearly draws a geographic arc around what the United States has defined as the “only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system”: *China*.<sup>8</sup>

The renewed Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 reinforces an existing dependency on China’s geopolitical stance. NATO and the Western nations are already unwilling to militarily affront an isolated, stand-alone, and sanctioned Russia. But in this context, any hint of China’s support to the Russian posture would dramatically shift the already overwhelmed balance of power. Where the Biden Administration has been issuing acute warnings of “implications and consequences” at any such sign made by China, France has instead sought to reach out in an attempt to foster constructive collaboration.<sup>9</sup> In a March 2022 video conference between French President Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping, both leaders stressed China’s support to the relentless efforts deployed by France in reaching a cease-fire, China’s key role in the ongoing Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiations with Iran, and the bilateral will to foster a constructive agenda in the development of the EU-China relationship.<sup>10</sup> War on the European continent is definitely not in China’s best interest. It does, however, happily accommodate the fact that this conflict currently draws the West’s undivided attention. From the position of a careful and sometimes malign observer, China revels in being able to analyze this dramatic but exceptional laboratory of civilizational struggle.

In this volatile context, the French Parliament has recently recommended striving to find this delicate balance of power, applying severity regarding several red lines, while constructively cooperating on key issues of

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7 Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

8 “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance,” The White House, March 2021, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

9 “Readout of President Joseph R. Biden Jr. Call with President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China,” The White House, March 18, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/18/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-2/>.

10 “Page Accueil Internet—Cadic Intégrale,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcgp.php>.

development and environmental protection. The Select Committee for Foreign Relations thus emphasizes that both France and the EU need to be extremely vigilant regarding key security challenges, such as: Chinese investments in Europe, norms and standards China is attempting to internationally mandate in several fields, Chinese malign influence operations within Europe, or theft of intellectual property. Nonetheless, these policy recommendations also recognize that China will soon be the World's leading economy, which requires the adoption of a firm but constructive posture. France thus stresses that where it isn't actively countered, Chinese development must instead be guided toward compliance with Western standards.

### *Military*

Non-state actors are more prevalent than ever. The high rate and wide spectrum of terrorism is also directly undermining regional stability. Islamic extremism has wreaked havoc in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, right-wing terrorism has done so in New Zealand, left-wing terrorism in India, while various ethnonationalist insurgencies regularly perpetrate attacks in the Philippines, Thailand, and Myanmar.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile and with some overlap of actors, acts of maritime piracy remain at a high-level in the Indo-Pacific, where the main areas of concern are the Singapore Strait and the Sulu-Celebes Seas.<sup>12, 13</sup> Although robberies and attacks while at port or anchor have reached an all-time low (30 events) in 2021, ReCAAP notes a sharp increase (+20%) in attacks while ships are underway (41 just in the Singapore Strait).<sup>14</sup>

Bearer of even greater danger, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear proliferation returned to the forefront of major concerns in 2017, when a Vietnamese and Indonesian escort unwittingly murdered Kim Jong-nam, half-brother of Kim Jong-un, by spreading VX nerve agent on

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11 Sam Mullins, "Terrorism in the Indo-Pacific" The Year Gone By and the Road Ahead," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, (Summer 2020): 5-12. <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jun/08/2002311969/-1/-1/1/mullins.pdf>.

12 Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia Information Sharing Centre, Situation Update (January–November 2021), [https://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/Latest%20Situation/Presentation%20on%20Situation%20\(January-November%202021\).pdf](https://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/Latest%20Situation/Presentation%20on%20Situation%20(January-November%202021).pdf).

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.



his face in the middle of Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Although both escorts testified to having been hired to perform what they believed was a simple prank, both the United States and South Korea concluded that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) orchestrated this terrifying assassination. The risk represented by the tactical use of chemical weapons in densely populated areas is acute, and only compounds with the strategic risks posed by what France calls “Pyongyang’s nuclear blackmail.”

### *Economic*

It is in the realm of economic priorities that the respective interests seem to be most alike. From a global perspective, the Indo-Pacific represents 60% of the World’s population, 60% of global GDP, and 57% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup> It is home to seven members of the G20, hosts half of the world’s 1.2 million kilometers of submarine cables, and its waterways carry over 50% of global maritime trade volumes, annually representing over \$3.5 trillion.<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> The Malacca Strait alone is the world’s single most important supply chain chokepoint, representing a major strategic dependency for both Europe and the United States. The total trade in goods and services within the Indo-Pacific region is comparable for the EU and the United States in volume, but not in proportion. In 2020, annual trade reached \$1.5 billion between the region and each of these two stakeholders. However, although this figure represents 30% of U.S. foreign trade, it only amounts to 11% for the EU.<sup>19</sup>

In the field of critical resources, the Indo-Pacific is also of unique importance to France, the EU, and the United States alike. The region accounts for 83% of rare earth mine production and 70% of nickel mining, both

15 “Population Trends,” UNFPA Asiapacific, December 2, 2014, <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/populationtrends>.

16 European Commission—High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” September 16, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_indo\\_pacific\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf).

17 “UNCTAD’s Review of Maritime Transport 2020: Highlights and Figures on Asia and the Pacific | UNCTAD,” accessed December 16, 2021, <https://unctad.org/press-material/unctads-review-maritime-transport-2020-highlights-and-figures-asia-and-pacific>.

18 “U.S. Support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-support-for-the-asean-outlook-on-the-indo-pacific/>.

19 “International Trade—Trade in Goods and Services—OECD Data,” theOECD, accessed December 16, 2021, <http://data.oecd.org/trade/trade-in-goods-and-services.htm>. <https://data.oecd.org/trade/trade-in-goods-and-services.htm>.

of which are critical for digital and electronic technologies. The small French territory of New Caledonia alone is the world's 4th largest nickel producer.<sup>20, 21, 22</sup>

Fishery resources constitute another critical stake, directly contributing to most of the maritime territorial disputes in the region. The Indo-Pacific hosts over 25% of the world's total ocean catch, with 12% alone being in the South China Sea.<sup>23</sup> This entails direct impacts on food, employment, sovereignty, crime, and the marine environment. This unique concentration of vital resources and critical maritime routes make the Indo-Pacific a strategic hub of French, EU, and United States core economic interests. Safeguarding resilient and diversified supply chains, sustainable practices, secure maritime trade routes, and freedom of navigation (FON) thus rank among the top strategic priorities of all three stakeholders. Of note is the fact that once combined, the United States and the EU represent 26.6% of China's total trade in goods. This bears along interdependency, but also a leverage no other association can provide.<sup>24</sup>

In the financial realm, Chinese direct investments in Europe between 2005 and 2019 have exceeded 320 billion USD, with more than half being invested in the strategic domains of energy and transport. Furthermore, these efforts have proven to be highly targeted, with merely 5 EU countries (France, UK, Germany, Italy, and Finland) concentrating two-thirds of the investments. Simultaneously, even though the overall amounts are more modest, the greatest rate of investment growth (+38% between 2014–2018 on average<sup>25</sup>) has been recorded in the geographically

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20 Joseph Gambogi, "Rare Earths," (January 2021), accessed December 16, 2021, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/periodicals/mcs2021/mcs2021-rare-earths.pdf>.

21 Nickel Institute: Knowledge for a Brighter Future, "The Life of Ni," accessed December 16, 2021, <https://nickelinstitute.org/media/1190/thelifeofni.pdf>.

22 Michele E. McRae, "Nickel," accessed December 16, 2021, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/periodicals/mcs2021/mcs2021-nickel.pdf>.

23 European Commission—High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," September 16, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_indo\\_pacific\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf).

24 European Commission—Directorate-General for Trade, "European Union, Trade in goods with China," accessed December 16, 2021, [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb\\_results/factsheets/country/details\\_china\\_en.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_china_en.pdf).

25 Samanya Sharma, "The 16+1 Initiative: Judged Too Quickly?," ORF, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-161-initiative-judged-too-quickly/>.

strategic countries of Eastern and Central Europe, many of which were signatories to China's BRI. Of course, Chinese investments are not the only area of economic interdependency. Concerning trade, China has overrun the United States as EU's leading trading partner in goods since 2021, with annual increase rates of 12.9% for EU exports and 18.5% for EU imports, generating an annual European trade deficit toward China of over \$200 billion USD in 2021.<sup>26</sup>

More interestingly still, the evolution of trade figures since 2020 show that EU commerce with China has been far more resilient to the COVID pandemic than commerce with the United States, thus further increasing interdependence. Although it is more prevalent in Europe than in the United States, this reality has recently been acknowledged on both shores of the Atlantic, with Harvard University's professor Joseph S. Nye, Jr. recently writing that "China has become the leading trading partner of more countries than the United States. Partial decoupling on security issues like Huawei is necessary, but total decoupling from our overall economic interdependence would be extremely costly, and even impossible in the case of ecological interdependence such as climate change or future pandemics. For better and worse, we are locked in a "cooperative rivalry" in which we have to do two contradictory things at the same time."<sup>27</sup> Seeking to make the best of this economic captivity, France advocates for better surveillance and regulation of Chinese investments and export subsidies, while simultaneously leveraging the EU's weight in global trade to encourage China to apply the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Paris Club financial rules, thereby foregoing its debt-trap diplomacy and tilting of the trading field.

26 Eurostat—Euroindicators, "Euro area international trade in goods surplus 3.6 billion Euros," October 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/11563419/6-16122021-%20AP-EN.pdf/fe1315b6-a0c5-56b3-3de3-13468db7becc>.

27 "Global Strategy 2021: An Allied Strategy for China," *Atlantic Council* (blog), accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/global-strategy-2021-an-allied-strategy-for-china/>.

## 1.2. Common Objectives and Strategic Convergence

Even though the interests and equities between France and the United States in the Indo-Pacific differ in areas, they “share common strategic visions and interests” and “should focus on where these priorities overlap” to reinforce the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific as “the strategic imperative vis-à-vis the rise of China is too important for the two countries not to do so.”<sup>28</sup> Recognizing the differences in strategies and priorities between the two nations resulting in potential tensions opens the door to also recognize the areas of opportunity for the two to work together, especially as at the foundation of the strategies, “both countries oppose China’s hegemonic designs” and desire “FON on the sea and in the air.”<sup>29</sup> Both France and the United States are best suited to understand and support each other in their roles in the Indo-Pacific to create the system and environment that benefits not only each other, but all democratic nations and the international community. France’s strategy in the region, focused on protecting their “country’s international position and its specific interests—notably, in the overseas territories that anchor and give credibility to the French strategy” can benefit from the support of the United States without drawing France into the Sino-American rivalry.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, as France is a “balancing power” in the region with their 2 million French citizens, 8,000 military personnel, lead role in the EU, and strong alliances and partnerships, they “offer strategic options” that can aid the United States in preserving their own interests in the region.<sup>31</sup> Opening each strategy for avenues of collaboration and focusing on the end goal of containing China’s hegemonic growth, both nations are able to align with other like-minded democratic nations and create a system that supports each other and achieves the goal of ensuring China does not become a hegemonic power overtaking the region and opening the path for them to expand their reach to redefine the current international order.

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28 Lohman, “The U.S. and France Should Double Down on Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

29 Frederic Grare, “France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/21/france-other-indo-pacific-power-pub-83000>.

30 Ibid.

31 Celia Belin, “AUKUS: A Cautionary Tale for French-American Relations,” War On the Rocks, December 13, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/12/aukus-a-cautionary-tale-for-french-american-relations/>.

Since the initial alliance was established between the United States and France in 1778, there has been great success as well as areas of tension between the two countries, with the most recent being AUKUS. Despite these times of friction, the alliance between the two countries has continued to be upheld as they share common democratic values, interests, and “have parallel policies on most political, economic, and security issues.”<sup>32</sup> In addition to these values and interests that tie the two countries together, they have also had a history of being able to discuss their differences candidly without damaging their relationship.<sup>33</sup> These shared values and interests, such as democracy, human rights, and liberalism, exist in their respective strategies and vision in the Indo-Pacific and can be capitalized on through their cooperation.

## The United States

As previously highlighted, both nations have high stakes in the region, with a similar strategic vision of ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific that aligns with the current international order. As both countries further develop and implement their strategies in achieving this vision, they can do so through leveraging each other’s strengths and capabilities in the diplomatic, economic, and security arenas by first reinforcing each other’s position and influence in the region. With the United States highly focused on security in the region, they bring a large military component, strong historical alliances, and economic resources to the region. In the U.S.’ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, the United States highlighted their prioritization of the region through the implementation of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, which was developed “to enhance the United States’ deterrence and defense posture in the Indo-Pacific region, assure allies and partners, and increase capability and readiness in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>34</sup> This initiative, focused on enhancing security capabilities in the region, authorized over 2.2 billion USD for FY21.

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32 “U.S. Relations With France,” *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed January 5, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-france/>.

33 Ibid.

34 House of Representatives, *William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021*, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/116/crpt/hrpt617/CRPT-116hrpt617.pdf>.

## France

On the other hand, France also has a sizeable military presence in the region, maintains a strategic position in the region based on its vast territories, and holds a unique position of influence in the EU that can be leveraged to bring like-minded European countries to also dedicate resources to the region to accomplish the strategic vision of maintaining a free and open Pacific. France has historically maintained close alliances and partnerships with multiple nations in the region and due to their “substantial capacity to influence the strategic, political, and economic evolution of the region makes its presence there desirable in the eyes of many partner states. The evolution of India’s and Australia’s positions on French authority in the Indian and Pacific Oceans over the past ten years is striking in this regard; France’s presence is now accepted rather than just tolerated, and each power views the state as a major strategic partner.”<sup>35</sup> India and Australia have realized the importance and strategic advantage that France brings to the region, and with them both being major players in the region, and a part of the Pacific Quad, the United States benefits from doing the same.

## The European Union

Another strategic benefit that France brings to the table is their role in the EU. As the EU turns its attention to the Indo-Pacific, they have also begun to realize their own interests in the region and the fact they must have a solid strategy in managing their relationship with China and ensuring China assumes “responsibilities in line with the benefits it draws from the rules-based international order.”<sup>36</sup> As the EU’s vision for the Indo-Pacific also aligns with the United States’, they recognize the importance of cooperation in the region. In their 2016 Joint Communication, they confirmed, “EU policymaking on China should take place in the context of a broad and rounded policy approach to the Asia-Pacific region, taking full advantage and full account of the EU’s

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35 Grare, “France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power.”

36 European Commission—High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” September 16, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_indo\\_pacific\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf).

close relationships with partners such as Japan, Korea, the ASEAN countries, Australia and others. Above all, given the fundamental importance of transatlantic links, EU-U.S. co-operation and co-ordination in this regard should be reinforced.”<sup>37</sup> France has the ability to positively influence cooperation and effect policy with other European states in order to protect their own national interests and has done so recently with pursuing the “strategic partnership with ASEAN in December 2020, [...] playing a driving role in promoting a common European position on the Indo-Pacific, [...] contributed to the drafting of the European Union’s Indo-Pacific strategy, [...] launched a dedicated working group on the Indo-Pacific within the European Intervention Initiative, [...] and helping to strengthen European naval visibility in the region.”<sup>38</sup>

These recent initiatives are profound foundational steps in aligning the Transatlantic alliance in the Indo-Pacific and “France could play an important role in U.S. strategy by contributing to greater coherence of efforts from like-minded countries across the region [...] and ensuring that Europeans play a valuable and coordinated role in the region.”<sup>39</sup> With the diplomatic, economic, and military power of the United States and EU all focused on creating a free and open Indo-Pacific that complements the current international order, France and the United States have the opportunity to work more effectively together to compete with China.

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37 Ibid.

38 “France: A Bridge between Europe and the Indo-Pacific?” accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/france-bridge-between-europe-and-indo-pacific>.

39 Grare, “France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power.”





## 2. Part II: China's Imperatives in the Indo-Pacific

### 2.1. Avoiding Chinese Domination in the Indo-Pacific

As we have seen in recent history, China has progressively advanced their interests in the region. They have militarized the South China Sea, engaged in border disputes, rebuffed on the “One China, Two Systems” with Hong Kong, and increased pressure on Taiwan through military exercises, crossing into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone numerous times. China has set a historic precedence that they will continue to push to regain control of Taiwan and has stated that it does not rule out the use of force to reunify Taiwan under the “One China” concept. Additionally, China’s continued advancements has put it at a marked advantage over Taiwan militaristically. As the western world and other democratic nations aim to ensure the Indo-Pacific remains a part of the free and open international order and preventing China from becoming a regional hegemon, they must rely on alliances and partnerships in the region. China’s aggressive actions of taking control of waterways, encroaching on other nations’ sovereignty, and disrupting (FON) throughout the region’s waterways cannot go unchecked. As the EU presented in their China Strategy, “The EU should continue to contribute actively to regional security in the Asia-Pacific through diplomatic and economic means while further developing its partnerships in the region. The EU remains concerned with the situation in the East and South China Seas and should continue to emphasize the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes and to oppose unilateral actions that could alter the status quo and increase tensions.”

The EU upholds its position on mandating compliance with international law by China and others in the context of their claims in the South China Sea. The large volume of international maritime trade passing through that area means that FON and overflight are of prime importance of the EU. The EU should encourage China to contribute constructively to

regional stability through confidence-building measures and support for the rules-based international order, especially in respect to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and its arbitration procedures, and the rapid conclusion of the ASEAN-China negotiations on a ‘Code of Conduct.’”<sup>1</sup> In hand with the EU’s strategy, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy also highlighted “Alliances and partnerships remain our key strategic advantage. Our allies, partners, and alliances such as NATO are an enduring asymmetric advantage over our rivals. They uphold international norms, generate naval power, and provide access to valuable strategic maritime positions. We must strengthen and expand our network of relationships to ensure our success in competition, crisis, and conflict.”<sup>2</sup> Another key aspect of achieving success in the region is utilizing “activities short of war” to “achieve strategic-level effects.”<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2. China’s Stated Intentions: China’s 2049 Initiative

China’s history defines its national identity today.<sup>4</sup> Significant events in China’s history led to their current state beginning in 1949 when the CCP gained control ending the period known as the Century of Humiliation where Western powers and Japan subjugated China to their external influence. In 1972 they established relations with the United States, and in 1989 the Tiananmen Square Massacre, occurred leading to China once again being criticized by the international community. Since then, China’s domestic and foreign policy strategy underwent a series of phases beginning with Deng Xiaoping’s strategy of “keeping a low profile while working hard over

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1 European Commission—High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” September 16, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_indo\\_pacific\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf).

2 Department of the Navy, US Marine Corps, and US Coast Guard, *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*, December 2020, accessed January 12, 2022, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/16/2002553074/-1/-1/0/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF>.

3 Department of the Navy, US Marine Corps, and US Coast Guard, *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*, December 2020, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/16/2002553074/-1/-1/0/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF>.

4 John Keay, *China: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

the long term to become an international political power.”<sup>5</sup> This strategy was maintained until 2008, when the “Global Financial Crisis led Beijing to see U.S. power as diminished and emboldened it to take a more confident approach. Now, with the invocation of ‘great changes unseen in a century’ following Brexit, President Trump’s election, and the coronavirus pandemic, China is launching a third strategy of displacement, one that *expands* its blunting and building efforts worldwide to displace the United States as the global leader.”<sup>6</sup> It was during these phases that China, and more specifically Xi Jinping, established China’s dream of national rejuvenation by 2049, which is the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the PRC.

“At the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping was the most specific of any Chinese leader on what rejuvenation by mid-century would mean: ‘China would become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence,’ construct a ‘world-class army,’ be actively involved in ‘global governance,’ and foster ‘a new type of international relations and build a community with a shared future for mankind.’”<sup>7</sup> China established programs and milestones to achieve their goals in 2049 such as their Made in China 2025 policy, the Belt and Road Initiative, and to build a “moderately prosperous society,” which Xi claims was accomplished in 2021.<sup>8</sup> The effects of the BRI investments and the enhanced footprint of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) are already heavily impacting the region. The timeline of achieving these goals may seem drastic and almost unachievable, especially knowing that China was still in their “keeping a low profile” strategy just 14 years ago. In less than 20 years, China has accomplished the near impossible by progressing at an unseen rate through their mastery of political warfare.

George Kennan described political warfare as “the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national

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5 Cameron Ross and Ryan Skaggs, “Competing with China Today,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* (Spring 2021), 54.

6 Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, Bridging the Gap Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 4.

7 *Ibid.*, 30.

8 The State Council The People’s Republic of China, “Xi Declares China a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects,” accessed January 4, 2022, [http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202107/01/content\\_WS60ddd47ec6d0df57f98dc472.html](http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202107/01/content_WS60ddd47ec6d0df57f98dc472.html).

objectives.”<sup>9</sup> China has grasped this concept brilliantly in their rise and perfected their vision of political warfare in their three warfares: public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare. Through authoritarian rule China can control nearly every aspect of their country, even individual freedoms. Their means to accomplish this is through the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), which is “the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP),” whose “purpose is to create political power for the party.”<sup>10</sup> The international community has witnessed China’s political power through their use of gray zone operations, information operations, and their ability to influence the international community demonstrated by claiming land in the South China Sea, encroaching on neighbor nation EEZs to include Japan and Taiwan; conducting military activities in the East and South China Seas; overtaking Hong Kong’s sovereignty; implementing the BRI; and pushing their narrative and influence through social media and establishments such as their Confucius Institutes. These activities and initiatives, further detailed hereafter, all drive toward China’s goal of national rejuvenation, which is ultimately designed to redefine the current international order to be more China-centric. Xi’s “understanding of the centrality of China [...] connotes a radically transformed international order. In Xi’s vision, a unified and resurgent China would be on par with or would surpass the United States.”<sup>11</sup> As Elizabeth Economy discussed in her article, “Xi Jinping’s New World Order,” China seeks to create a “China-centric order with its own norms and values,” which would inherently go against the current international system based on liberal democracies “committed in principle to universal human rights, the rule of law, free markets, and limited state intervention in the political and social lives of their citizens.”

Multilateral institutions and international law were designed to advance these values and norms, and technology was often used to bolster them. Yet Xi seeks to replace those values with the primacy of the State. Institutions, laws, and technology in this new order reinforce state control, limit

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9 George Kennan, “The Inauguration of Political Warfare [redacted version],” 30 April 1948, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive.

10 Peter Mattis, “China’s ‘Three Warfares’ in Perspective,” War on the Rocks, January 30, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>.

11 Elizabeth Economy, “Xi Jinping’s New World Order,” December 15, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-12-09/xi-jinpings-new-world-order>.

individual freedoms, and constrain open markets. It is a world in which the state controls the flow of information and capital both within its own borders and across international boundaries, and there is no independent check on its power.”<sup>12</sup> Even in dealing with coronavirus, Xi has used China’s response and ability to control the spread as “evidence that he was on the right track: China was reclaiming its historic position of leadership and centrality on the global stage.”<sup>13</sup>

## 2.3. Indo-Pacific Domination: Gateway toward 2035 and 2049 Objectives

### Peripheral Diplomacy

As China has continued to progress in their strategy, one of the main priorities they are working toward is gaining control and influence in the Indo-Pacific to become a regional hegemon. China altered their foreign policy strategy to encompass “peripheral diplomacy,” recognizing the importance of the region in bolstering their economic development and regional influence. China’s economic power has become so strong that other states in the region have been forced to develop relations with China.<sup>14</sup> To reach their goal of national rejuvenation and redefining the international order, China must first become a regional hegemon and are thus focused on a regional expansionist agenda in East Asia. “Liu Zhenmin, vice foreign minister for foreign affairs, pulled these themes together succinctly in an essay he wrote in 2014. ‘For China to realize its dream of national rejuvenation, it first needs to acquire identification and support from other Asian countries and to tie the dream of the Chinese people with those of the Asian nations.’”<sup>15</sup> China is not only focused on gaining the support of other Asian countries, but are also making economic, diplomatic, and military moves that drive other Asian countries to have to rely on them economically and for security. China is working toward this goal

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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Chris Ogden, *China and India: Asia’s Emergent Great Powers*, 1st ed., Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2017, 117.

15 Doshi, *The Long Game*, 173. Bridging the Gap Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)

through “peripheral diplomacy and order-building through a ‘Community of Common Destiny’ [which is] essential to China’s ultimate global rise.”<sup>16</sup> The leverage China is building over other Asian countries aids in their goal of pushing out western countries such as the United States and France and decreasing their level of influence in the region.

## Community of Common Destiny

Since China has shifted from their strategy of “hide and bide” to open their doors and engage more with the international community in 2009, they have implemented this strategy into their foreign policy guidelines. China has described the concept of “Community of Common Destiny” as a China-dependent Asia that has broken U.S. military alliances, which they believe is essential to their global rise.<sup>17</sup> “On this basis, China quickly became the pivotal influence concerning the region’s political, economic, and diplomatic affairs. [...] Highly self-aware and role-projecting, Beijing presents itself as a ‘benevolent great power’ via its rhetoric of a ‘peaceful rise,’ and assertions that it ‘neither interferes in other countries’ internal affairs nor imposes its will on others...and will never seek hegemony no matter how strong it may become. [...] China is using diplomacy and a sophisticated ‘charm offensive’ to win over neighbours.”<sup>18</sup> On the economic and institutional side, China said the ‘Community of Common Destiny’ was a state of being ‘interconnected’ and ‘intertwined’; on the security side, it defined it as being against the ‘Cold War mentality,’ which generally refers to the United States and its Asian alliances.<sup>19</sup> As Xi Jinping highlighted, “China would ‘take actions that will win us support and friendship’ and ‘in response, we hope that neighboring countries will be well inclined toward us, and we hope that China will have a stronger affinity with them, and that our appeal and our influence will grow.’”<sup>20</sup> If China is able to push the United States, France, and the EU out, while breaking down the alliances with other Asian states, the only other option they have is to rely on China, especially in the economic and security realms.

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16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ogden, *China and India*.

19 Doshi, *The Long Game*, 169–170.

20 Ibid, 171.

## One China

China is not only working to gain leverage over other Asian countries, but they are also highly focused on what they call national reunification with the territories they believe are part of China. As John Mearsheimer states, their main expansion targets are not only strategic locations, but they are “considered sacred territory, which means their fate are bound up with Chinese nationalism. This is especially true of Taiwan: the Chinese feel an emotional attachment to the island...making Washington’s commitment to defend it all the riskier.”<sup>21</sup> China has already made substantial progress toward their goal of national reunification with Hong Kong and Macao. As outlined in the CCP’s new resolution on history, issued by Xi Jinping in November 2021, “Defining national reunification as a major historical task, the Party worked tirelessly to complete it. Comrade Deng Xiaoping introduced the creative concept of One Country, Two Systems, paving a new path for achieving unification through peaceful means. Through arduous work and struggle, the Chinese government successively resumed its exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong and Macao, thus ending a century-long history of humiliation. Since Hong Kong and Macao’s return to the motherland, the central government acted in strict compliance with China’s Constitution and the basic laws of the special administrative regions and maintained lasting prosperity and stability in the two regions. [...] The Party pushed for the enactment of the Anti-Secession Law, resolutely deterred separatist forces seeking “Taiwan independence,” promoted national reunification, and thwarted attempts to create ‘two Chinas,’ ‘one China, one Taiwan,’ or ‘Taiwan independence.’”<sup>22</sup>

As Xi Jinping has demonstrated, Taiwan has become a personal challenge that he is determined to take back as part of the “One China” ideology, regardless of the progress that Taiwan has made as a democratic nation, critical to the international economy and technological advancements. Ensuring the United States and France maintain strong alliances and a foothold in the region is not only to guarantee China is not able to gain

21 John J. Mearsheimer, “The Inevitable Rivalry,” November 16, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-10-19/inevitable-rivalry-cold-war>.

22 “Full Text of the Chinese Communist Party’s New Resolution on History,” Nikkei Asia, accessed January 4, 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Full-text-of-the-Chinese-Communist-Party-s-new-resolution-on-history>.

regional hegemon status, but more importantly, it is critical to maintain the current multipolar international order that the United States and France aim to safeguard. This can be accomplished by working together to ensure the region is part of the current international order and not subjected to the subordinate role that China is trying to create throughout the region.

## 2.4. Constraining China's Strategic Objectives

In its 14th Five-Year Plan, the CCP promises that by 2025 “the well-being of the people will reach a new level.”<sup>23</sup> Although the goal is as ambitious as it is hazy, the key to its achievement lies in the CCP’s dual-circulation strategy: “greater domestic circulation creates a dynamic domestic market, spurs trade, attracts global resources, and stimulates internal and external demand, import and export, and inbound and outbound investment. It contributes to international cooperation and helps sharpen China’s competitive edge.”<sup>24</sup> China’s economic development is thus based on two paradigms: consumption-driven growth to expand domestic demand, while boosting exports and foreign direct investment when still beneficial. In a 2020 commentary, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) describes the dual-circulation strategy as the Chinese version of “hedged integration”: “this model entails engaging international capital, financial, and technological markets when advantages can be gained while simultaneously bolstering indigenous capabilities to avoid overreliance on the global economy—due to national security concerns or the vagaries of global economic cycles.”<sup>25</sup> The rapid growth of median wages has brought the past model of low value-added, export-driven production to the limits of its viability. Within the aforementioned “Made in China 2025” model, China’s evolving priorities now require a resolute transition to “innovation

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23 “The 14th Five-Year Plan and 2035 Targets—Global Times,” accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1205347.shtml>.

24 The People’s Government of Fujian Province, “Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035 of the People’s Republic of China\_ News\_ 福建省人民政府门户网站,” accessed December 17, 2021, [https://www.fujian.gov.cn/english/news/202108/t20210809\\_5665713.htm](https://www.fujian.gov.cn/english/news/202108/t20210809_5665713.htm).

25 Jude Blanchett and Andrew Polk, “Dual Circulation and China’s New Hedged Integration Strategy,” August 24, 2020, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/dual-circulation-and-chinas-new-hedged-integration-strategy>.



driven,” “high quality” production to feed the exacting consumption of China’s rising middle-class. Technological development and the definition of norms and regulations will lay the basis for international competition.

There are, however, three major impediments lying on the road to China’s dual circulation strategy: the United States, France, and the EU. The current domination exercised by these three actors in the fields of connectivity, technology, goods and services markets, international currency usage and norms, and regulations stands in the way of Chinese economic domination.

## Obstacles to Economic Domination

The U.S. Dollar and Euro, when taken together, currently account for over 80% of foreign exchange reserves<sup>26</sup> and for 95% of export invoicing.<sup>27</sup> They also represent over 80% of foreign currency banking claims and liabilities. Although the share of the Chinese renmimbi in these fields has slowly started to increase since 2015, it only represents single digit contributions. As noted by the U.S. Federal Reserve in December 2021, “the renminbi is not freely exchangeable, the Chinese capital account is not open, and investor confidence in Chinese institutions, including the rule of law, is relatively low. These factors all make the Chinese renmimbi—in whatever form—relatively unattractive for international investors.”<sup>28</sup>

The economic confrontation isn’t restricted to the monetary realm. The “domestic market loop” of China’s dual circulation strategy requires a qualitative upscaling of production, especially in the fields of technology and communications. Both the United States and France, however, stand in the way of what could have been China’s limitless evolution, both in technology and market shares. Two striking examples come to mind: development and

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26 According to the IMF, however, the share of the USD has been steadily decreasing from 71% in 1999 to 59% in 2020. The EUR share has remained relatively constant since its introduction in 1999, oscillating between 20 and 30%. These figures go to show that this currency leverage, if it is to be effective, must be exercised jointly and in a coordinated manner. For more, cf. IMFBlog, “US Dollar Share of Global Foreign Exchange Reserves Drops to 25-Year Low,” *IMF Blog* (blog), accessed December 20, 2021, <https://blogs.imf.org/2021/05/05/us-dollar-share-of-global-foreign-exchange-reserves-drops-to-25-year-low/>.

27 Carol Bertaut, Bastian von Beschwitz, and Stephanie Curcuru, “The International Role of the U.S. Dollar,” October 6, 2021, <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/the-international-role-of-the-u-s-dollar-20211006.htm>.

28 Carol Bertaut, Bastian von Beschwitz, and Stephanie Curcuru, “The International Role of the U.S. Dollar,” October 6, 2021, <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/the-international-role-of-the-u-s-dollar-20211006.htm>.

implementation of 5G networks and semi-conductors, both set against the backdrop of tomorrow's new critical currency: data. The Chinese Huawei tech-giant has rapidly become the leading worldwide provider of 5G infrastructure. Backed by Xi Jinping's 2015 Digital Silk Road initiative, Huawei has reached a worldwide telecommunications market dominance, procuring 31% of global equipment in 2020.<sup>29</sup> However, two factors taken very seriously by the United States and France are now drastically curbing this development: China's 2017 National Intelligence Law and Huawei's close ties with the CCP. While the latter is endemic under China's unified political-military-industrial structure, the former clearly explicates the threat posed by Huawei's digital infrastructure. As underlined by ODNI's NCSC Director William Evanina, the PRC's Intelligence Law "compel every Chinese citizen and company to assist in national security or intelligence work. This should concern you if you represent clients that work in or with China."<sup>30</sup>

China's Cybersecurity Law, in its article 28, is even more explicit in that regard, mandating that "network operators shall provide technical support and assistance to public security organs and national security organs that are safeguarding national security and investigating criminal activities in accordance with the law." The security threats posed by Huawei have thus triggered effective responses from both France and the United States. As early as 2019, both countries have effectively banned Huawei from their 5G infrastructures, although different constitutional restrictions have led them down slightly different legal paths in doing so.<sup>31</sup> The United States has gone even further in countering Huawei's dominance by adding Huawei and its affiliates to the Department of Commerce "Entities List." This procedure effectively prevents Huawei from procuring critical U.S. semi-conductors and any "items produced domestically and abroad from U.S. technology and software" and "restricts Huawei from obtaining foreign

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29 Global Times, "Huawei Still Tops Global Telecom Equipment Makers in 2020," March 9, 2021, accessed June 28, 2022, [https://consumer.huawei.com/ph/community/details/Huawei-still-tops-global-telecom-equipment-makers-in-2020/topicId\\_124219/](https://consumer.huawei.com/ph/community/details/Huawei-still-tops-global-telecom-equipment-makers-in-2020/topicId_124219/).

30 William Evanina, "Keynote Remarks International Legal Technology Association LegalSEC Summit 2019," accessed December 21, 2021, [https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/news/20190606-NCSC-Remarks-ILTA-Summit\\_2019.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/news/20190606-NCSC-Remarks-ILTA-Summit_2019.pdf).

31 Whereas the US has implemented an outright ban on Huawei 5G infrastructure, French legal restrictions have forced it to develop a more complex legal framework. Nonetheless, the latter has been constructed in a way that it is effectively unfeasible for a French telecom operator to resort to Huawei hardware. For most recent developments, refer to the 2021 sustaining ruling by the French Constitutional Court: <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2021/2020882QPC.htm>

made chips developed or produced from U.S. software or technology to the same degree as comparable U.S. chips.”<sup>32</sup> Given those measures, telecom analysts assess that “Huawei’s global market share peaked at the start of 2020 and has been falling significantly since then. Pretty much all other major vendors, bar ZTE and Ciena, seem to have benefitted from Huawei’s slide and the signs are that Huawei’s non-China share will continue to fall off a cliff.”<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, France, the EU, and the United States should not consider the confrontation as over. In June 2021, proving its plasticity and resilience, Huawei announced the creation of its “Digital Power Technologies” subsidiary, which aims at providing low- to zero-carbon emitting data centers and site energy digitalization solutions, actively offering its services in most Indo-Pacific countries.<sup>34</sup>

## Trade Regulation

In the trade regulatory field, the United States and EU also exercise a dominating role, both in the enforcement of fair-trade practices and in the control of foreign direct investments. Although this supremacy was challenged during the Trump administration, the United States and EU have recently taken considerable steps, leveraging their influence to reshape the WTO. Taking the bilateral steel and aluminum tariffs as a starting point, the United States and EU are now seeking to link trade regulation with joint political objectives. As stated by President Biden, this U.S.-EU agreement will “incentivize emission reductions in one of the most carbon-intensive sectors of the global economy; restrict access to our markets for dirty steel from countries like China; and counter countries that dump steel in our markets, hammering our workers and harming them badly along with the industry and our environment.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, 2021 has

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32 U.S. Department of Commerce, “Commerce Department Further Restricts Huawei Access to U.S. Technology and Adds Another 38 Affiliates to the Entity List,” U.S. Department of Commerce, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.commerce.gov/news/press-releases/2020/08/commerce-department-further-restricts-huawei-access-us-technology-and>.

33 Scott Bicheno, “Huawei Continues to Lose Share of Booming Global Telecoms Equipment Market—Telecoms.Com,” June 16, 2021, <https://telecoms.com/510187/huawei-continues-to-lose-share-of-booming-global-telecoms-equipment-market/>.

34 Huawei, “Network Energy-Huawei,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://carrier.huawei.com/en/products/digital-power>.

35 “Remarks by President Biden and European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen on U.S.-EU Agreement on Steel and Aluminum Trade,” The White House, October 31, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/10/31/remarks-by-president-biden-and-european-commission-president-ursula-von-der-leyen-on-u-s-eu-agreement-on-steel-and-aluminum-trade/>.

also seen increased cooperation in this regard between the United States, EU, and Japan. In a clear attempt to strengthen their collective stance facing China, all three have agreed on the “importance of WTO reform in an effort to build a free and fair rules-based multilateral trading system,” arguing that their “trilateral partnership [will] address the global challenges posed by non-market policies and practices of third countries that undermine and negatively affect [...] workers and businesses.”<sup>36</sup> These initiatives show how strong trade leverage is in preventing China from tilting the economic chessboard.

In testimony to that effect, a U.S. Congressional assessment of Chinese trade countermeasures outlines how these “recent measures are part of a broader effort by China’s leader Xi Jinping since 2014 to build out China’s national security authorities to establish broad justification, jurisdiction, and mechanisms for China’s national security-related actions on trade, investment, and other economic activity.”<sup>37</sup> Coordinated trade initiatives, led by the United States, France, and EU stand in the way of malign foreign economic development. In that regard, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) initiated under President Obama, later abandoned by President Trump, was the single greatest opportunity of linking trade benefits with fair and lawful practices in the Indo-Pacific. In 2016, the Congressional Research Service acknowledged this causality, stating that “some argue that China is attempting to create a regional order that seeks to minimize U.S. presence and power. In this line of reasoning, the TPP serves as a counter to growing Chinese economic and political influence, implying that failure to conclude TPP could, in effect, allow China to shape regional rules of commerce and diplomacy through its own trade and investment initiatives.”<sup>38</sup>

The Obama Administration Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter even equated the TPP to an additional carrier strike group in the Indo-Pacific, further imaging the intricate links between trade and security. Due to President Trump’s withdrawal, the TPP has never seen the light of day. The

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36 European Commission, “#EUTrade News,” Trade—European Commission, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2330>.

37 Congressional Research Service, “China’s Recent Trade Measures and Countermeasures: Issues for Congress, December 10, 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46915>.

38 Congressional Research Service, “The Trans-Pacific Partnership: Strategic Implications,” February 3, 2016, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R44361.pdf>.

11 remaining countries, however, decided to pursue the strongly normative free-trade project, creating the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for TPP (CPTPP). Actors of this regional free-trade area, one of the most important in the world, hold the keys to shape the regulatory framework of global trade practices. On 16 September 2021, China has officially applied to become a CPTPP member. Exploiting the Western countries every seam and weakness, China made their CPTPP bid the day after the United States, Australia, and UK announced the AUKUS security cooperation program, which side-lined both France and the EU.

## Armament Exports

Despite coordination pitfalls such as AUKUS, armament exports to the Indo-Pacific are another critical area where the United States and France stand obstacle to China's economic influence plans. In foreign military sales, they are respectively ranked first and third worldwide, with the Indo-Pacific concentrating most of the largest export contracts.<sup>39</sup> Together, the United States and France account for over 44% of global arms exports, while China's state-owned companies hold the fourth ranking worldwide.<sup>40</sup> Given that interoperability of NATO and Chinese-manufactured major weapon systems is near to impossible, any defense markets seized by France and the United States should remain exclusive of Chinese exports in the foreseeable future. The latest breakdown of Chinese military sales demonstrates this with its three largest customers being Pakistan (38%), Bangladesh (17%) and Algeria (8.2%). French and U.S. military sales in the Indo-Pacific are thus an important impediment to China's defense industry and its role in the dual circulation strategy. However, China is not remaining helpless, recently setting foot in Near-East and European markets, where it has supplied strike-capable Wing Loong UAVs to Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi-Arabia, amongst others.<sup>41</sup> China thus displays market vigilance

39 U.S. Department of State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, "U.S. Arms Transfers Increased by 2.8 Percent in FY 2020 to \$175.08 Billion," January 20, 2021, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-arms-transfers-increased-by-2-8-percent-in-fy-2020-to-175-08-billion/>.

40 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "USA and France Dramatically Increase Major Arms Exports; Saudi Arabia Is Largest Arms Importer, Says SIPRI," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/usa-and-france-dramatically-increase-major-arms-exports-saudi-arabia-largest-arms-importer-says>.

41 "Winning Streak: China Hits Stride in Armed MALE UAV Exports," *Janes.com*, April 22, 2020, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/winning-streak-china-hits-stride-in-armed-male-uav-exports>.

and a swift capacity in filling any arms procurements voids, including amongst the traditional partners and customers of both the United States and French defense industries.

## Diplomatic Competition

China's foreign reach isn't only increasing in the field of arms exports. Xi Jinping has resolutely turned the page of Chinese strategic modesty. After Sun Tzu's "feigned weakness" and Deng Xiaoping's "low profile," China is now analyzed by the U.S. White House Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell as being "more risk acceptant, more assertive, and more determined to basically take steps that other countries would view as coercive." He further adds that "no country in history has undertaken such a broad gauge, extraordinary military modernization over the last 30 years as China. Across every sector: nuclear, conventional, naval, air, land."<sup>42</sup> China's power is now a force that will need to be contended with worldwide, but especially in the Indo-Pacific. Xi Jinping's directives leave little space for ambiguity: "We must adopt a holistic approach to national security that balances development and security imperatives and implement the national rejuvenation strategy within a wider context of the once-in-a-century changes taking place in the world."<sup>43</sup> Exhibiting power and being assertive, however, isn't without risks. It creates both fear and antagonism. It is a plan bound to face major hurdles, two of which—in very different and complementary ways—are, once again, the United States and France. The United States and France are unique in sharing three major characteristics, which curtail Chinese diplomatic powerplays in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere: both are permanent members of the UN Security Council, both are nuclear powers, and both have global reach blue-water navies, which are permanently deployed in the Indo-Pacific.

### *The United Nations*

Although China is undeniably seeking to increase its influence within the UN, the United States remains by far the largest financial contributor, while France consistently retains leadership over the critical Department

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42 Michael Fullilove, "In Conversation: Kurt Campbell, White House Indo-Pacific Coordinator," December 1, 2021, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/conversation-white-house-indo-pacific-coordinator-kurt-campbell>.

43 "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Speech on the CCP's 100th Anniversary—Nikkei Asia," accessed December 1, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Full-text-of-Xi-Jinping-s-speech-on-the-CCP-s-100th-anniversary>.

of Peacekeeping Operations. It is also within the UN that France has initiated several diplomatic initiatives that run contrary to China's dynamics of power. Fragilizing the PRC's position regarding its repressive policy in the Xinjiang region, France carries a proposal aimed to regulate the use of Security Council veto power wherever a mass atrocity has been ascertained. As of January 2021, 105 countries are signatories to the proposal, including almost every Nation in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>44</sup> France also supports a reform of the Security Council, advocating the attribution of permanent seats for two of China's greatest contenders in the Indo-Pacific: India and Japan.<sup>45</sup> More recently still, in November 2021, the French parliament adopted a resolution supporting the accession and representation of Taiwan in certain international organizations, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, Interpol, the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change, and the World Health Assembly.<sup>46</sup> Naturally, the resolution stirred China's ire, as have the regular visits of French Senators and Representatives to Taiwan, or the ongoing modernization by the French defense industry of the weapons systems onboard the Lafayette-class frigates, which France sold to Taiwan in the early 1990s.

### *Nuclear Balance of Power*

In the nuclear weapons realm, the United States and France also hold a unique position, which China must contend with. They are the only two Western countries capable of deploying both a naval and airborne nuclear capability within reach of China's territory. Apart from the major strategic role this unique deterrence provides, it also makes both countries particularly intent on preserving FON in the seas and airs of the Indo-Pacific.

The navies of both countries consequently and regularly enforce these freedoms. In 2021, France has deployed its nuclear aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, the nuclear submarine L'Emeraude<sup>47</sup> and the SIGINT ship Dupuy

44 Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères. "Soutiens à l'initiative franco-mexicaine d'encadrement du veto en cas d'atrocités de masse." *Diplomatie.gouv.fr*. 20 January 2021. [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2021\\_01\\_20\\_veto\\_-\\_initiative\\_encadrement\\_-\\_carte\\_des\\_soutiens\\_fr\\_\\_cle0cab3d.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2021_01_20_veto_-_initiative_encadrement_-_carte_des_soutiens_fr__cle0cab3d.pdf)

45 "France and the United Nations—Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/united-nations/france-and-the-united-nations/>.

46 Assemblée Nationale, "Proposition de résolution n° 4271 en faveur de l'association de Taïwan aux travaux des organisations internationales et des forums de coopération multilatérale," Assemblée nationale, accessed June 28, 2022, [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/115b4271\\_proposition-resolution](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/115b4271_proposition-resolution).

47 "French Joint Commander for Asia-Pacific Outlines Paris' Indo-Pacific Defense Plans," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/french-joint-commander-for-asia-pacific-outlines-paris-indo-pacific-defense-plans/>.



de Lome in the Indo-Pacific. In October 2021, the latter's route included navigation in the Taiwan Strait in a deliberate effort to challenge China's increasingly aggressive stance against Taiwan.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in the South China Sea, both France and the United States regularly challenge territorial bids by navigating in waters claimed as being territorial by China. As underlined by the Commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet, "on Sept. 8, [2021] USS Benfold asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the Spratly Islands, consistent with international law. This freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea. USS Benfold demonstrated that Mischief Reef, a low-tide elevation in its natural state, is not entitled to a territorial sea under international law."<sup>49</sup>

### *Geopolitical Containment*

More importantly still, as Xi Jinping has set his mind on "Global China," France and the United States both stand in the way from a purely geopolitical perspective. China's paths outward and its major political, economic, and military battlefields are located East and South. The containment exercised therein by the United States and France is both strong and complementary, the former being close and active, whereas the latter is further and geopolitically passive. Both countries form a dual concentric arc, encircling China's ambitions, and meddling with the strategic depth it is seeking to acquire in accordance with its "near seas defense and far seas protection" doctrine.<sup>50</sup> U.S. bases and deployed forces form a strong and comprehensive impediment in the very heart of the First and Second Island Chains, which China considers as its "near seas": the last extra-territorial line of defense. In that area alone, U.S. forces can rely on its substantial bases in South Korea, Japan, and Guam. This allows to effectively prevent Chinese acts of *fait accompli* in the Western Pacific through implementation of the Inside-Out Defense Doctrine: "lethal and resilient 'inside' forces able to fight and persist within highly contested environments with agile, long-range 'outside' forces capable of fighting from standoff distances or

48 "Commission Des Affaires Étrangères, de La Défense et Des Forces Armées : Compte Rendu de La Semaine Du 11 Octobre 2021," accessed June 28, 2022, <http://www.senat.fr/compte-rendu-commissions/20211011/etr.html#toc3>.

49 "7th Fleet Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation," Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, accessed June 28, 2022, <http://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/2766757/7th-fleet-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation>.

50 "China's National Defense in the New Era—Ministry of National Defense," accessed June 28, 2022, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2019-07/24/content\\_4846452.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2019-07/24/content_4846452.htm).



penetrating A2/AD networks. Together, these inside and outside forces could create a responsive, yet survivable, forward defense-in-depth in the Western Pacific capable of rapidly blunting Chinese aggression at the outset of a conflict.”<sup>51</sup>

This duality is carried throughout the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy statements, including the recently declassified U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, which mandates the implementation of “a defense strategy capable of, but limited to: (1) *denying* China *sustained* air and sea dominance inside the first island chain in a conflict; [...] (3) *dominating* all domains outside the first island-chain.”<sup>52</sup> The specific wording of these two-staged defense doctrines imply that China has already achieved dominance in its near seas, thus mandating U.S. reinforcements within and beyond the second island chain, such as the recent Global Posture Review’s decision to enhance “infrastructure in Guam and Australia and prioritize military construction across the Pacific Islands.”<sup>53</sup> In a quite classic stunt of propaganda, the Chinese State-run media Global Times has framed these decisions as the “United States admitting that China has become powerful enough to break the first island chain, so it is now stepping back to the second island chain.”<sup>54</sup>

Whatever rhetoric maneuvers may be used, the strategic reach of the PLA is indeed very rapidly increasing. The 2019 Chinese White Paper of National Defense in the New Era outlines the underlying doctrine, stating that “In line with the strategic requirements of near seas defense and far seas protection, the PLAN is speeding up the transition of its tasks from defense on the near seas to protection missions on the far seas, and improving its capabilities for strategic deterrence and counterattack, maritime maneuver operations, maritime joint operations, comprehensive defense, and integrated support, so as to build a strong and modernized

51 “Tightening the Chain: Implementing a Strategy of Maritime Pressure in the Western Pacific,” CSBA, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/implementing-a-strategy-of-maritime-pressure-in-the-western-pacific/publication/1>.

52 Department of Defense, *U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific*, No. 000174, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>.

53 “Biden Approves Global Posture Review Recommendations,” U.S. Department of Defense, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2856053/biden-approves-global-posture-review-recommendations/>.

54 “US Global Posture Review Targets China; Exposes Weakness in 1st Island Chain—Global Times,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1240312.shtml>.

naval force.”<sup>55</sup> Attracted by its economic imperatives and deflected by U.S. military power, the outreach of China’s power has increasingly turned both to the Indian Ocean and toward the South Pacific. As early as 2013, Chinese military thought already underscored the strategic value of the Indian Ocean, a “crucial area in influencing our nation’s strategic development and security in the future. It is also the intermediate zone of our entrance into the Atlantic Ocean region, Mediterranean Sea region, and Arctic Ocean region.”<sup>56</sup> The PLA could further use Chinese port infrastructures in Sri Lanka (Hambantota) and Pakistan (Gwadar) and is already operating out of its base in Djibouti. It is simultaneously seeking to acquire deep-water port real estate in Polynesia.

This theater strategy, the northern part of which is often dubbed the String of Pearls, frequently stumbles upon another geo-strategic hurdle: France. Far from having America’s military power and holding no permanent equities in the first and second island chains, it nonetheless counters China’s expansionist power plays through a form of passive containment, positioning itself as a major and legitimate Indo-Pacific state. At its westernmost edge, China’s String of Pearls stumbles upon a strong French-U.S. military stronghold: the joint bases in Djibouti, where French forces have been permanently stationed since 1884. Moving eastward, France appears at regular intervals along the wide Indo-Pacific arc described by Admiral Alfred Mahan as “holding the key to the seven seas in the 21st Century, where the destiny of the World will be decided.”<sup>57</sup> It holds the territorial equities of Mayotte and La Reunion, along with 1.1 million inhabitants and a military presence, which exercises influence in Madagascar, South-Eastern Africa, and the Central Indian Ocean. Descend further south, and China’s Antarctic ambitions are guarded by the vast French Sub-Antarctic and Antarctic Territories. Pursue west into the Pacific Ocean and the southern side of the equator is guarded by two of France’s largest EEZs, New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Although this string of territorial possessions seems a healthy distance from China’s immediate periphery, it impedes its “forward edge defense” ambitions. These rely heavily on the

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55 “China’s National Defense in the New Era—Ministry of National Defense.”

56 Jun shi ke xue yuan jun shi zhan lue yan jiu bu, *Zhan lue xue: = The science of military strategy*, Di 1 ban, 2013 nian ban, Jun shi ke xue yuan jun shi li lun zhu zuo (Bei jing: Jun shi ke xue chu ban she, 2013).

57 Mahan, Alfred. “The Indian Ocean in World Politics.” *India Quarterly—A Journal of International Affairs* 43, no. 3–4: 195–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F097492848704300301>

dual-use nature of BRI infrastructures, which intend to provide a comprehensive network capable of supporting power projection, such as deep-sea ports, airstrips, and high-volume accommodation.

One testimony to the importance of France's territorial chain in the Indo-Pacific is China's continued effort to secure major real estate on the island of Hao, in French Polynesia. Hao is a small French atoll located in the center of the South Pacific. It is so remote that its closest renowned neighbor is probably Point Nemo.<sup>58</sup> And yet, through unrelentless legal battles since 2014, the Chinese company Tahiti Nui Ocean Foods (TNOF) has secured 74 acres of coastal real estate and promised over 30 billion USD in investment to set up an industrial fish farm employing 10,000 workers. The production target is estimated at 110 million pounds of fish per year, which represents almost 2% of the yearly consumption of a country like the United States, while Hao's population doesn't exceed 1,700 inhabitants. More worryingly still, as underlined by a recent investigation of France's National Audit Court, the terms of the 30-year agreement signed with TNOF were bound by a confidentiality agreement, representing a major risk to its financial soundness.<sup>59</sup> The sheer volume of the expected fishery operations and its export requirements would undoubtedly require major port infrastructures, which naturally implies once again the looming threat of China's possible endgame: further development of dual-use marine bases for its projection of power.

When visiting French Polynesia in July 2021, French president Emmanuel Macron spoke out against the project, warning against “the incursion of hegemonic powers, which will come to seize the fish, the technologies, the economic resources,” before adding that “this is Polynesia. But this is France! And you will be protected. [...] I sometimes see projects, which I could attempt to qualify as being exotic, adventurous, doubtfully funded, creating mysterious jobs, borne by strange investors. Be wary!” Summarizing why these French territories are so attractive for China's power projection, he added, the French “Indo-Pacific strategy will bear

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58 Point Nemo was defined by the survey engineer Hrvoje Kumatela in 1992 as being the point in the world's oceans farthest from any landmass. In fact, at any given moment, the closest human presence to Point Nemo are the astronauts on board the ISS. Point Nemo lies roughly 2300 miles South of Hao.

59 “Collectivité de La Polynésie Française—Projet d'aquaculture Industrielle de HAO | Cour Des Comptes,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.ccomptes.fr/fr/publications/collectivite-de-la-polynesie-francaise-projet-daquaculture-industrielle-de-hao>.

French Polynesia at its heart, to protect you, protect your fishermen, protect your economic interests, protect our cables, protect our satellites, protect our sovereignty against foreign incursions.”<sup>60</sup> Soon thereafter, he ordered a military battalion to be stationed on the Hao atoll, offering civic and military education to local youth. The Chinese authorizations to build the infrastructures in Hao expire in 2022, but Tahiti Nui Ocean Foods is maintaining a heavy legal, economic, and media pressure on the local government, thus countering centralized democratic processes with a thorough use of gray zone operations.

## 2.5. Gray Zone Operations: China’s Toolkit against the French–U.S. Impediment

In our Hellenistic model of thought, we require definitions, models, and objectives. So it is in the fields of competition, conflict, and warfare. Whatever eludes this universal intellectual process, we have labeled “the Gray Zone.” It is the haven of all that escapes our deterministic dichotomy between war and peace, truth, and falsehood, domestic and international, military and civilian, and public and private. U.S. Special Operations Command works with a very succinct definition of “competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors, that fall between the traditional war and peace duality.”<sup>61</sup> In a more extensive approach, the RAND Corporation sees the gray zone as “an operational space between peace and war, involving coercive actions to change the status quo below a threshold that, in most cases, would prompt a conventional military response, often by blurring the line between military and nonmilitary actions and the attribution for events.”<sup>62</sup>

Chinese strategic thought, however, approaches the question on wholly different terms. The French *geophilosopher*, Francois Jullien, believes the issue

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60 Macron, Emmanuel. “Discours du président de la république à Papeete, Tahiti.” [Elysee.fr](https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-18162-fr.pdf). 28 July 2021. <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-18162-fr.pdf>

61 <https://www.soc.mil/swcs/ProjectGray/Gray%20Zones%20-%20USSOCOM%20White%20Paper%209%20Sep%202015.pdf>

62 Lyle J. Morris, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression below the Threshold of Major War* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2019), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2942.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2942.html).

is not the “otherness of Chinese thought when compared to the European one. It is the exteriority of one relative to the other, its *heterotopia*. Chinese thought isn’t *different*, it is *elsewhere*.”<sup>63</sup> Two famous paragraphs in *The Art of War*, by Sun Tzu, give us a simple and pragmatic insight into this heterotopia: “Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting. [...] Therefore, the skillful leader subdues the enemy’s troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them; he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field. With his forces intact he will dispute the mastery of the Empire, and thus, without losing a man, his triumph will be complete. This is the method of attacking by stratagem.”<sup>64</sup>

## Defining Gray Zone Operations

Whether we analyze gray zone operations from a Hellenistic or from a Confucian perspective, whether we read them through the Western prism of Clausewitz or by the eastern teachings of Sun Tzu, there are certain traits that they have, and others that they don’t. They are neither diplomacy, nor are they warfare, although they borrow some tools from both. In the heterotopian struggle between authoritarianism and democracy, this gray stratagem of choice is:

- revisionist, but incremental
- strategic in its ends, but peripheral in its means
- coercive, but not escalatory
- bluntly attributable, but officially deniable
- subversive, but sparing the adversaries’ critical interests
- manipulative, but highly coordinated.

More importantly still, the French and U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific are challenged by China’s gray zone activities both in the material and the cognitive spaces.

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63 Vincent Citot, “Entretien avec François Jullien,” *Le Philosophoire* 31, no. 1 (2009): 27–36, <https://doi.org/10.3917/phoir.031.0027>.

64 Sun Tzu, translated by Lionel Giles M.A., *Sun Tzu on the Art of War*, 2000, [https://sites.ualberta.ca/~enoch/Readings/The\\_Art\\_Of\\_War.pdf](https://sites.ualberta.ca/~enoch/Readings/The_Art_Of_War.pdf).

## China's Use of Gray Zone Operations in the Physical Space

It is in the material realm that these actions are the most perceptible, placing the decision-making burden on the targeted competitor, while simultaneously heightening the risk of escalation. The material realm includes naval coercion, but also economic, diplomatic, and legal warfare.

### *Naval Coercion*

The South and East China seas are of the utmost strategic importance for China. From an economic perspective, the CCP has long realized that “these navigation routes and waterways already have become the ‘lifelines’ of our socioeconomic development, and although in overall terms they are kept unimpeded, they are nonetheless not owned by us, nor are they controlled by us. Once a crisis or war at sea occurs, our sea transport has the possibility of being cut off.”<sup>65</sup> From a geostrategic perspective, Mao Zedong realized that all of China’s wars since 1840 have “made their way in from the sea.” More recently, access to deep waters ensuring the discretion of submarine-borne nuclear deterrence has additionally motivated the extension of China’s maritime possessions.

The CCP has thus prioritized a revisionist and incremental conquest of these maritime spaces, in perfect application of its gray space stratagems. First, to provide endemic historical and legal justification to the possession of the sought-after maritime space, so is born the concept of the “9-dash line,” substantiated by territorial claims to various reefs and shoals that lie within. Second, they expand these islets to ensure they remain above the high-tide line so they can host ships, aircraft, and people. Third, they apply what Rear Admiral Zhang Zhaozong dubbed the PLAN’s “cabbage tactics”<sup>66</sup> in a 2013 television interview. The first layer surrounding the contested island is composed of private or state-owned fishing vessels. By their sheer presence, these numerous but generally unarmed ships can effectively block any other maritime activity, civilian or military, while remaining immune from reprisals. Layers are successively composed of the PLAN’s Maritime Militia for confusion, the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG)

65 Jun shi ke xue yuan jun shi zhan lue yan jiu bu, *Zhan lue xue*.

66 For a detailed account from the field, cf. Himmelman, Jeff. 2013. “A game of shark and minnow.” New York Times Magazine, 10/27/2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/newsgraphics/2013/10/27/south-china-sea/index.html>

for coercion, and at a stand-off but threatening range, grey hull warships of the PLAN for escalation mitigation. The Maritime Militia is composed of reserve civilians or Navy veterans. It is subsidized by the government, which has procured it with reinforced-hull fishing vessels with ammunition storage.<sup>67</sup> It regularly trains with and assists the PLAN and the CCG, while also maintaining an array of conventional commercial activities.

These maritime gray zone operations have been used on a regular basis in the East and South China Seas. An example occurred on 23 March 2021, at Whitsun Reef in the Spratly Islands, a territory disputed between Vietnam, the Philippines and—naturally—China. On that day, 220 Chinese fishing vessels were mooring off the reef. In that same week, in concordance with the aforementioned “cabbage tactics,” four PLAN warships were also present in the Spratly’s, according to the Philippine Government’s National Task Force-West Philippines Sea.<sup>68</sup> In this textbook example of *fait accompli* geopolitics, Vietnamese and Philippine fishing vessels were prevented from approaching Whitsun Reef, accompanied by an absence of any legitimate naval enforcement of the UNCLOS defined EEZ. That week, the 9-dash line was the only territorial reality, contrary to the unanimous 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, whence “the Tribunal concluded that there was no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to resources within the sea areas falling within the nine-dash line.”<sup>69</sup>

### Lawfare

Despite China’s ratification of UNCLOS in 1982, it has built a comprehensive domestic lawfare suite to assert its own interest. In 1992, the “Law on Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone” defines “all [...] islands belonging to the PRC,” thus allowing itself to exercise sovereignty in the adjacent waters of any territorial claim. In 1998, a second law defines the PRC’s notion of the EEZ, as the “area adjacent to and beyond the territorial sea of the People’s Republic of China,” thus incrementally building a legal structure

67 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress*, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>, 71.

68 “With Swarms of Ships, Beijing Tightens Its Grip on South China Sea—The New York Times,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/03/world/asia/swarms-ships-south-china-sea.html>.

69 The Hague—Permanent Court of Arbitration, *The South China Sea Arbitration: The People’s Republic of the Philippines v. the People’s Republic of China*, July 12, 2016, <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Press-Release-No-11-English.pdf>.



parallel to UNCLOS. The 1998 “Law on the EEZ and Continental Shelf” also introduces authorization to “construct, operate and utilize artificial islands,” all the while carefully underlining that no provisions of law “can prejudice historical rights of the People’s Republic of China,” in a clear reference to the unilateral 1947 eleven-dash line. In a vivid example of the PRC’s “rule by law,” China doesn’t entirely ignore UNCLOS. In fact, it also uses the treaty to its unique advantage. Considering that UNCLOS does not specify any restriction to military navigation within the EEZs, China passed the peculiar “Surveying and Mapping Law” in 2002. This stipulates that for the purpose of the law, “surveying and mapping” shall refer to “surveying, collection and presentation of the shape, size, spatial location and properties of the natural geographic factors or the man-made facilities on the surface, as well as the activities for processing and providing of the obtained data, information and achievements.”<sup>70</sup> Routine naval and air-borne ISR missions have thus been brought under the banner of “surveying and mapping.”<sup>71</sup>

Article 7 serves to further build the case, mandating that “a foreign organization or individual that conducts surveying and mapping in the domain of the People’s Republic of China must take the form of joint venture or cooperation with the relevant departments or entities of the People’s Republic of China, and may not deal with any state secret and harm the state security.”<sup>72</sup> With this incremental and patient domestic legal construct, China has created a *de facto* unilateral legal basis to define its own EEZ, additionally restricting any military navigation activity within it. Pushing the argument back onto the international stage, this South China Sea lawfare operation yielded two *Notes Verbales* in 2009, informing the UN Secretary General that “China has indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed and the subsoil thereof.”<sup>73</sup> The note included the following maritime claim to virtually the entire South China Sea:

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70 Dean Cheng, “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Legal Warfare,” The Heritage Foundation, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/winning-without-fighting-chinese-legal-warfare>.

71 ISR: Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

72 “SURVEYING AND MAPPING LAW OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA,” accessed June 28, 2022, <http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/samlotproc506/>.

73 People’s Republic of China. “The Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United



### 3.



The same principles of lawfare have been applied to the collection of the 21st century’s most valuable currencies: data and intellectual property. In an analogous unilateral legal maneuver, China has passed several subsequent laws to guarantee State access to data and full cooperation of tech companies. The 2017 Cybersecurity Law mandates that data collected by “critical information infrastructure operators,” shall be “stored within mainland China.”<sup>74</sup> In that same year, furthering the incremental legal framework, the PRC passed the “National Intelligence Law,” which states that “all organizations and citizens shall support, assist, and cooperate with national intelligence efforts.”<sup>75</sup> Finally, the 2020 “Foreign Investment Law” enacted a series of seemingly protective measures for foreign companies incorporated in China, broadly requiring they shall not “impair China’s security or damage any public interest,” and that, in any case, “a safety review shall be conducted for any foreign investment affecting or

Nations to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.” Un.org. May 7 2009. [https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/vnm37\\_09/chn\\_2009re\\_vnm.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/vnm37_09/chn_2009re_vnm.pdf).

74 “Translation: Cybersecurity Law of the People’s Republic of China (Effective June 1, 2017).” *DigiChina* (blog), accessed June 28, 2022, <https://digichina.stanford.edu/work/translation-cybersecurity-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-effective-june-1-2017/>.

75 China Law Translate, “National Intelligence Law of the P.R.C. (2017) 中华人民共和国国家情报法 (2017) —,” *China Law Translate* (blog), June 28, 2017, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/national-intelligence-law-of-the-p-r-c-2017/>.

having the possibility to affect national security.”<sup>76</sup> Under a comprehensive blanket of laws relative to the protection of data, intelligence, and foreign investment, the CCP has guaranteed that all data collected will remain on Chinese soil, where cooperation with the intelligence community is required and where any foreign enterprise can undergo safety reviews. Owing to this construct, according to a June 2021 investigation by the New York Times, “Apple has ceded legal ownership of its customers’ data to Guizhou-Cloud Big Data, or GCBD, a company owned by the government of Guizhou Province.”<sup>77</sup> All the customers’ iCloud data is now stored on Chinese-run servers in Central China, operated by GCBD employees. Due to fear of U.S. liability, this is even notified in the fine print of Apple’s iCloud Terms and Conditions for China, which bluntly requires users to approve that “you understand and agree that Apple *and* GCBD will have access to all data that you store on this service.”<sup>78</sup>

Despite these invasive and restrictive laws and policies, China strives to attract foreign investment, as demonstrated by some unique and progressive legal guarantees covering intellectual property and transnational equity movements implemented in the 2021 Foreign Investment Law revision. This could be a sign of constructive openness. Seen from the perspective of the dual-circulation economic strategy, it may also be the initial step in strengthening the domestic high-end production spectrum. After all, since Apple’s 2017 half-billion-dollar investments in several R&D centers in China, the legendary “Designed by Apple in California” engraving was removed from iPhones due to pressures from offended Chinese officials and employees. Lawfare is intimately intertwined with forceful foreign economic influence. The Chinese effort to secure and control its global supply and distribution chains is coalesced under one banner, introduced by Xi Jinping in 2013: the BRI.<sup>79</sup> Under official pretenses of infrastruc-

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76 “Foreign Investment Law of the People’s Republic of China-National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) People’s Republic of China,” accessed June 28, 2022, [https://en.ndrc.gov.cn/policies/202105/t20210527\\_1281403.html](https://en.ndrc.gov.cn/policies/202105/t20210527_1281403.html).

77 Jack Nicas, Raymond Zhong, and Daisuke Wakabayashi, “Censorship, Surveillance and Profits: A Hard Bargain for Apple in China,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2021, sec. Technology, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/17/technology/apple-china-censorship-data.html>.

78 “Legal—iCloud GCBD—Apple,” Apple Legal, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.apple.com/legal/internet-services/icloud/en/gcbd-terms.html>.

79 “The Belt and Road Initiative,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cegv/eng/zywjyh/t1675564.htm>.

ture development and investment, especially in the Indo-Pacific, the BRI encloses a powerful gray zone tool: incremental economic coercion.

### *Economic Coercion*

Like many economic foreign policies, China's is built upon two pillars: development aid and infrastructure investment abroad. However, it bears two notable characteristics. Attractively enough, the first is an absence of requirements and structural reforms regarding domestic affairs, unlike the principles associated with Western financial aid, abiding by the Washington Consensus.<sup>80</sup> The second, however, is more pernicious. Known as debt-trap diplomacy, it eventually entraps debtors into inevitable infrastructure—equity swaps, much to the benefit of Chinese state-run companies. Naturally, both aid and investments often entail the provision of international diplomatic support for China's geopolitical agenda.

In the field of development aid and overseas investment, the Indo-Pacific has been an area of major Chinese effort. This check-book diplomacy toward the fragile Pacific Island Countries (PICs) is an effort of counter-containment, securing bridgeheads for the BRI, accessing critical resources, and acquiring favorable votes within the UN General Assembly. Over the last 8 years, since the BRI's launch, Chinese state-run companies have massively invested in many Indo-Pacific countries. In fact, the 8-year BRI investment spree has been so massive that it has exceeded 10% of their annual GDP in nine of these countries: Djibouti, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Solomon Islands. Two Pacific Island States, traditionally diplomatic allies of Taiwan, have switched their allegiance to the PRC in 2019: Kiribati and the Solomon Islands. Both are examples of China's economic gray zone coercion.

In 2019, after the Solomon Islands severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan, Wanguo International Mining Group Ltd. invested \$276 million USD to redevelop the Gold Ridge Mine in the Solomon Islands, which was shut down in 2015. As reported by Standard & Poor's Global, Wanguo has effectively acquired 77.78% of the Australian, but Chinese-owned, AXF Gold Ridge Pty Ltd, which in turn "owns a 90% stake in mining license

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<sup>80</sup> "Washington Consensus—Intelligent Economist," April 30, 2018, <https://www.intelligenteconomist.com/washington-consensus/>.

holder Gold Ridge Mining Ltd.”<sup>81</sup> That initial investment is to be followed by a \$500 million USD investment into the islands’ infrastructure and underground development. For comparison’s sake, the Solomon Island’s annual GDP doesn’t exceed \$1.57 billion USD.<sup>82</sup> As a testimony to its geopolitical importance, it is also worth noting that the Gold Ridge project is located on the Guadalcanal battlefields, where the U.S. Marines won a decisive campaign in 1942, curbing Japanese expansion in the Pacific. To make bad things worse, Reuters gained access to reliable documents indicating the Solomon Islands were discussing a \$100 billion USD loan from Chinese “confidential donors,”<sup>83</sup> with a century-long repayment schedule. This loan would represent 64 years of the entire country’s economic output. In 2020, social media in the Solomon Islands was trending with overt criticism of government leadership and ubiquitous contestation of the political and economic shift toward the PRC. In November 2020, the government decided to enact a ban on Facebook, before rescinding a few months later in the face of grave business and popular opposition.<sup>84</sup> No matter how “gray,” these aggressive and coercive operations have an undeniable collateral effect: they spark ever-increasing popular resistance. In November of 2021 in Honiara (Guadalcanal province), a protest on the government’s pro-PRC policy turned to violent riots after being ignored by Prime minister Sogavare. Consequently, most of Honiara’s Chinatown was destroyed and several people killed.

China has deployed similar economic coercion operations in Kiribati, which is centrally located in the Pacific Ocean, where it owns the largest EEZ.<sup>85</sup> Kiribati severed its diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 2019, a few days after the Solomon Islands. Since that date, it has joined the BRI and has hosted massive Chinese investments aimed at renovating a major

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81 Karl Decena, “Wanguo Signs US\$276M Mining Contract for Gold Ridge Project | S&P Global Market Intelligence,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/trending/-ctgzehlun6zqlhpbhguuq2>.

82 The World Bank, “Solomon Islands Data,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/solomon-islands>.

83 Jonathan Barrett, “Solomon Islands Seeks \$100 Billion Loan from Chinese Interests-Documents | Reuters,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-solomonislands/solomon-islands-seeks-100-billion-loan-from-chinese-interests-documents-idUSKBN20F12I>.

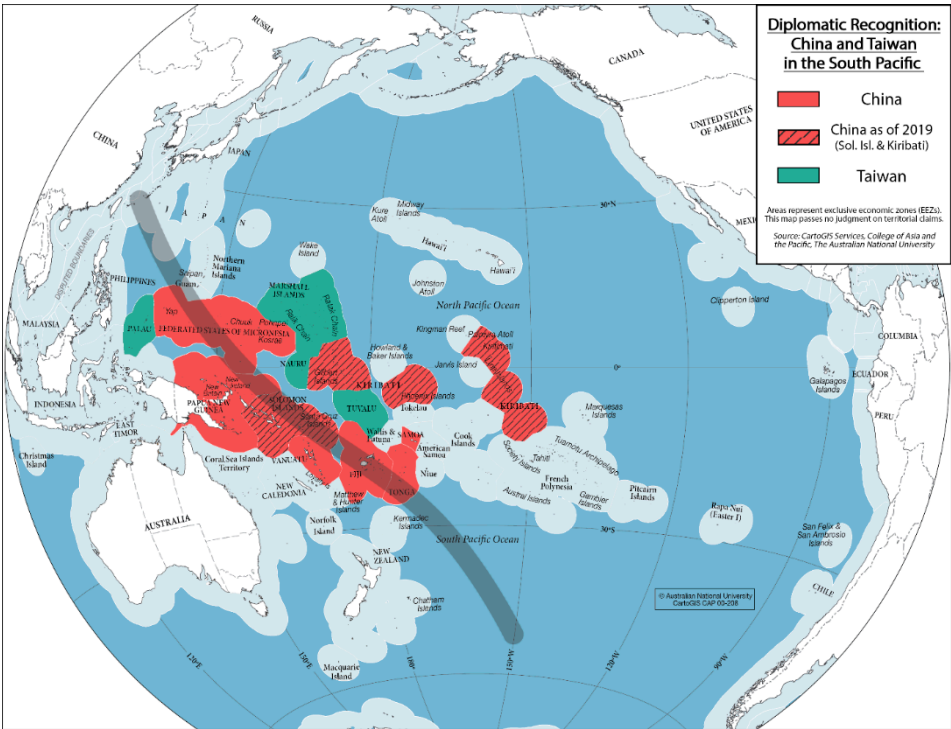
84 Georgina Kekea, “Solomon Islands Cabinet Passes Ban on Facebook—Solomon Times Online,” *Solomon Times.com*, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/solomon-islands-cabinet-passes-ban-on-facebook/10421>.

85 Kiribati is the only State spanning all four of the World’s hemispheres. It has an EEZ of 3.5 million square kilometers and is sprawled around the geographic center of the Pacific Ocean.

airstrip on Kanton and engaging in major island building and dredging operations. Since WWII, Kiribati has been an allied stronghold in the region, hosting U.S. Air Force long range bomber stopovers as well as space and missile tracking stations until the 1960s. In fact, China also holds its only overseas space tracking station on the South Tarawa Island, which was mothballed during the time of Kiribati's allegiance to Taiwan. The new diplomatic and economic *rapprochement* could also spur dual-use investment in the space segment, used for China's manned space program but also for the tracking and telemetry of ballistic missiles.

As demonstrated graphically hereafter by The Diplomat, China's gray zone operations in the Pacific have already allowed it to gain the influence necessary to secure a comprehensive and strategic communications and logistics channel toward the southeast, including the construction of dual-use bridgeheads, bringing the Americas and the Antarctic ever closer. This channel is bordered by United States and French equities, along with a few resisting Pacific Island States, such a Palau, Nauru, the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu:

**4. Pacific Geopolitics of Diplomatic Recognition of the PRC**



Courtesy of *TheDiplomat.com*.<sup>86</sup>

86 Jason Li, "Solomon Islands: A Pacific Linchpin Is Pulled," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/solomon-islands-a-pacific-linchpin-is-pulled/>.

China's initial line of expansion under the BRI effort, however, was in the Indian Ocean. The "Western Route" was secured by patient and incremental efforts of heavy investment, and gray zone debt trap diplomacy. An exclusive benchmarked study of 100 Chinese debt contracts by an international team of scholars has recently shed more light on how lending to foreign governments is designed to deliver leverage or even coercion. Their detailed analysis shows that these contracts use unusual combinations of novel lending terms to maximize the potential of duress:<sup>87</sup>

- *Confidentiality*: "All of the post-2014 contracts with Chinese state-owned entities in our sample contain or reference far-reaching confidentiality clauses. [...] Broad borrower confidentiality undertakings make it hard for all stakeholders [...] to ascertain the true financial position of the sovereign borrower, to detect preferential payments, and to design crisis response policies. Most importantly, citizens in lending and borrowing countries alike cannot hold their governments accountable for secret debts."
- *Security*: "30 percent of Chinese contracts in our sample [...] require the sovereign borrower to maintain a special bank account [...] that effectively serves as security for debt repayment. [...] In practice, this means that government revenues remain outside the borrowing country and beyond the sovereign borrower's control."
- *Default*: "50 percent of CDB contracts in our sample include cross-default clauses that can be triggered by actions ranging from expropriation to actions broadly defined by the sovereign debtor as adverse to the interests of "a PRC entity." All CDB contracts in our sample include the termination of diplomatic relations between China and the borrowing country among the events of default, which entitle the lender to demand immediate repayment. More than 90 percent of the Chinese contracts we examined [...] have clauses that allow the creditor to terminate the contract and demand immediate repayment in case of significant law or policy changes in the debtor or creditor country."

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87 Anna Gelpern, Sebastian Horn, Scott Morris, Brad Parks, and Christoph Trebesch, "How China Lends: A Rare Look into 100 Debt Contracts with Foreign Governments," Center for Global Development Ideas to Action, March 31, 2021, <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/how-china-lends-rare-look-into-100-debt-contracts-foreign-governments>.

### *Conquering Strategic Overseas Infrastructural Equities*

Today, this policy allows China to operate support bases Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the UAE, Djibouti and Sudan, all of which could also have dual-use capability. Two of these infrastructure investments by Chinese State-owned enterprises are particularly striking in terms of economic coercion: Gwadar Port in Pakistan and Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka.

Gwadar Port lies at the mouth of the Hormuz Strait, considered as one of the world's most strategic sea bottlenecks. It also plays another strategic role, being one of the very few connection points between the inland belt road and the maritime belt. Gwadar Port is the intermodal hub of the CPEC: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The CPEC was presented by Xi Jinping in April 2015 as the BRI's largest investment in a single country, with an initial estimate of \$46 billion USD. Such investments aren't without consequences: since the launch of the BRI, China's share in Pakistan's external debt tripled, from 9.3% to 27.4%.<sup>88</sup> In 2017, under dire economic distress, Pakistan gave a 40-year lease of Gwadar Port to state-owned China Overseas Port Holding Company. The lessee will also retain "90 percent of revenue from Gwadar's marine operations, plus 85 percent of the revenue from the management of an adjacent free zone."<sup>89</sup> Strategically, the CPEC thus endows China with several major levers: direct access to the Indian Ocean through Gwadar Port, infrastructural containment of India and extremely strong economic and infrastructural control over Pakistan. Moreover, according to a study of the Office of Opinion Research of the U.S. Department of State, 86% of Pakistanis still hold a favorable opinion of China in 2021.<sup>90</sup> Bolstered by these massive investments and a pro-PRC stance of the Pakistani State-run media, this is the single highest popularity rating in any of the 64 surveyed countries.

Another country where China enjoys 77% of favorable opinions is Sri Lanka. Very much alike to Pakistan, it is an essential "pearl" in the maritime BRI, and undeniably contributes to India's containment. Very much alike Gwadar,

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88 Uzair Younus, "Pakistan's Growing Problem with Its China Economic Corridor," United States Institute of Peace, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/05/pakistans-growing-problem-its-china-economic-corridor>.

89 "Pakistan Gives China a 40-Year Lease for Gwadar Port," The Maritime Executive, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/pakistan-gives-china-a-40-year-lease-for-gwadar-port>.

90 Although the figure has decreased from the 97% of favorable opinions that the same study noted in 2017.



it hosts Hambantota—a deep water port that is the PRC’s most powerful leverage of economic coercion. In fact, although violently denounced by Chinese State media, the debt-trap mechanism is astoundingly similar. Sri Lanka under the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa was mismanaged and corrupt. Similar to Pakistan, its external debt was skyrocketing, and the country’s S&P credit rating was a mediocre B. This was perfect breeding ground for China to accept what India had refused: China’s EXIM Bank invested \$1.34 billion USD into the construction of a massive deep-water port in the president’s native region: Hambantota. The port was even precipitously opened in 2010, despite being ready, because it was Rajapaksa’s birthday. By 2015, the servicing of Sri Lanka’s debt accounted for almost half its GDP, while the expected increase in traffic and revenues from botched feasibility studies was nonexistent. In fact, the tonnage transiting through Hambantota declined over the years, reaching an all-time low in 2017, and port operations accumulated a total loss of about \$300 million USD.<sup>91</sup> At the verge of default, and with the Sri Lankan Rupee losing more than 25% of its value, the country desperately needed cash. India, Japan, and even China refused. However, the latter found a keen investor: state-owned China Merchants Port Holding, Ltd (CM Port). For \$1.12 billion USD, CM Port acquired a 99-year lease, along with an additional 15,000 acres of land in order to implement the Chinese “port-park-city” economic model and temporarily relieving Sri Lanka from defaulting. This mechanism is even more devious than a simple debt-equity swap, as the equity is lost for 99 years, but the debt remains. Sri Lanka must still repay \$100 million USD per year for its loan from China’s EXIM Bank, while 70% of the profits generated by Hambantota Port are being cashed by CM Port. On 12 January 2022, S&P rated Sri Lanka CCC, with an unsurprising negative outlook, indicating its chances to default are now close to 50%. Its foreign currency reserves could be negative by 2023<sup>92</sup> and over half its population has fallen below the poverty line in the past two years. Sri Lanka has no alternative but to ask China for debt restructuring, thus becoming even more vulnerable to its diplomatic, economic, and political control.

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91 Chatham House—International Affairs Think Tank, “Debunking the Myth of ‘Debt-trap Diplomacy,’” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/08/debunking-myth-debt-trap-diplomacy/4-sri-lanka-and-bri>.

92 Despite at least two recent major currency swaps with India and China.



These gray zone operations of economic coercion are not without precise, long-term geopolitical objectives to exercise control of the Indian Ocean. The most recent U.S. Department of Defense Report on Military and Security Developments Involving the PRC goes beyond these two case studies of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, stating that “beyond its base in Djibouti, the PRC is pursuing additional military facilities to support naval, air, ground, cyber, and space power projection. The PRC has likely considered a number of countries, including Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan, as locations for PLA facilities. A global PLA military logistics network and PLA military facilities could both interfere with U.S. military operations and support offensive operations against the United States as the PRC’s global military objectives evolve.”<sup>93</sup>

The PRC is remarkable in its gray zone use of both carrots and sticks. Much like Lorelei, the mystical mermaid in Heinrich Heine’s 1824 poem, China feels unduly cast aside by recent history. Much like Lorelei, her attractiveness surpasses the ability of people to mitigate threats, inevitably leading them into dire straits. Much like Lorelei, China exercises a mysterious and shrouded control over the cognitive perceptions of her partners and competitors:

*“I think that the waves will devour  
The boatman and boat in the end  
And this by her song’s sheer power  
Fair Lorelei has done.”*<sup>94</sup>

## China’s Use of Gray Zone Operations in the Cognitive Space

Precisely defining and augmenting the “song’s sheer power” has long been a major concern of Chinese policy and warcraft. The latter is famously based on the precepts attributed to Sun Tzu, wherein “supreme excellence

93 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Development Involving the People’s Republic of China 2021: Annual Report to Congress*, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>.

94 Ingrid Bauer, “What Is the Translation of Heinrich Heine’s Poem, ‘Die Lorelei?’” April 29, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/heinrich-heine-german-author-1444575>.

consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."<sup>95</sup> Doing so however, requires a patient, methodical, and comprehensive approach. One must perfectly understand his enemy, an exercise in profound empathy, which implies amassing extensive data and deploying deeply embedded intelligence collection. One must then carefully analyze behavioral, cultural, and political biases and weaknesses, to strain the enemy's seams. This in turn implies frequent probing through limited actions, to gain a better understanding of causality. Finally, one may then deploy subtle efforts aimed at influencing and manipulating the enemy's cognitive space: perception, polarization and ultimately, decision-making. This requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach, which is highly facilitated when authority is centralized throughout the action spectrum: civilian, military, diplomatic, cultural, economic, media, diaspora, and even organized crime.

The PLA published "Political Work" legislation in 2003 and 2010 to direct and coordinate these efforts. It "stressed that the PLA should train its abilities to win media warfare, psychological warfare and legal warfare."<sup>96</sup> These three axes are known as the "three warfares concept." Even more candid is the fact that the PLA regularly enacts Political Work Regulation, bearing testimony to a "system-of-systems" effort, which Xi Jinping advocated as "deep military-civilian integration in the new era."<sup>97</sup> Applying this guidance, the PLA has duly noted that "man-machine combined operation, cloud operation, war of algorithm and cognitive war" rank amongst the most important evolutions of modern conflict and warfare.<sup>98</sup> Cloud operation will amass required data, algorithmically augmented man-machine operations will enhance analysis, thus allowing the deployment of cognitive war, which is to "influence and lead the cognition, emotion, and consciousness of the public and national elites, and ultimately influence a country's values, national spirit, ideology, cultural traditions, and historical beliefs [...] to achieve the strategic goal of winning without war."<sup>99</sup>

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95 Sun Tzu, *Sun Tzu on the Art of War*, 8.

96 "PLA Implements New Political Work Regulation—People's Daily Online," accessed June 28, 2022, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/7139024.html>.

97 "Xi Stresses Military-Civilian Integration in New Era—Ministry of National Defense," accessed June 28, 2022, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/cmc/2018-03/03/content\\_4805775.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/cmc/2018-03/03/content_4805775.htm).

98 "Overview of International Military Conflicts and Security Situation in 2020—China Military Network," accessed June 28, 2022, [http://www.81.cn/jwywpc/2020-12/24/content\\_9962575\\_4.htm](http://www.81.cn/jwywpc/2020-12/24/content_9962575_4.htm).

99 Rachael Burton, "Disinformation in Taiwan and Cognitive Warfare," Vol. 3, Issue 22—Global Taiwan Institute, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2018/11/vol-3-issue-22/>.

Here once again, our Hellenistic approach leads us to dissect and categorize these operations into influence, cognitive, political, public opinion, psychological, or information domains. The CCP's approach however is far more holistic, coordinating actions throughout the spectrum with a careful blend short-term opportunism and far-reaching strategic direction. As demonstrated by the three warfares strategy, Chinese thought does not conceive manipulating psychology without a correlated effort in the media and legal domains. Gray space actions within the cognitive space will thus be simultaneously applied in the fields of intelligence collection, data access and analysis, media, social media and disinformation, political influence, election meddling, and weaponizing the extensive Chinese diaspora. From an exogenous perspective, China relies on two principal means of developing and enhancing its operations: studying lessons previously learned by its Russian counterparts and testing various operations in a favorable environment: the Indo-Pacific.

### *Understanding the Adversary—Intelligence and Data Collection*

Successfully operating on the cognitive sphere requires a deep understanding of the subject's preoccupations, perceptions, mindsets, and decision trees. These can be acquired through intelligence and data collection, and as many other nations, China has engaged in both. Nonetheless, the scale in which these efforts have been deployed is unprecedented.

China's main intelligence agency is the Ministry of State Security (MSS). In recruiting agents abroad, it has opted for a far more aggressive stance, often reaching out to potential targets through social media or messaging applications under professional pretenses. In the past years, LinkedIn has proven to be one of the main recruitment platforms for Chinese agents. Quite naturally, France and the United States are amongst the MSS's main targets. French and English were in fact both amongst a list of six foreign languages evaluated as critical in an accidentally leaked 2015 recruitment spree for the Shanghai State Security Bureau, a purveyor of the MSS.<sup>100</sup> In 2018, the French intelligence agency, DGSE, reported that over 4,000 French senior individuals have been contacted by pseudo-corporate or

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100 Peter Mattis, "Everything We Know about China's Secretive State Security Bureau," Text, The National Interest (The Center for the National Interest, July 9, 2017), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/everything-we-know-about-chinas-secretive-state-security-21459>.

think-tank virtual personas over LinkedIn.<sup>101</sup> Government officials, public servants, strategic industry managers, and critical infrastructure employees were all targeted. Although these contacts were remotely initiated, they demonstrated a good knowledge of each individual's previous and current work, as well as their areas of personal interests. Those who responded were graciously invited to China, where a few hours were spent discussing prospective cooperation, while most were devoted to high-end tourism. This visit is also an opportunity for the MSS to evaluate the individual value in terms of intelligence collection. According to DGSE estimates, this extremely high-scale recruitment scheme has proven effective in at least several hundred cases, indicating a tremendous yield of close to 10%.<sup>102</sup> The recruited individuals were then run by a Chinese case officer, who asked to provide analysis based on confidential or sensitive information. The French intelligence community officially attributed these recruitment operations to the MSS, even taking the diplomatic risk of disclosing the cover structures under which it operated. Amongst these were: the China Center for International Politics and Economy (CCIPE), D&R Human Resources (DRHR), Global View Strategic Consulting or Iris Go Global.<sup>103</sup>

The exact operating scheme was deployed by the Chinese MSS to collect intelligence in the United States. Using social media and professional networking, the MSS successfully recruited agents related to intelligence, academia, scientific research, and government. In fact, very much like in France, these operations achieved such an unprecedented scale that according to the U.S. Department of Justice, “about 80 percent of all economic espionage prosecutions [...] allege conduct that would benefit the Chinese state.”<sup>104</sup> In just a few years, the operations' depth and magnitude allowed for the recruitment of no less than four former intelligence

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101 Christophe Cornevin and Jean Chichizola, “État, Entreprises: Comment La Chine Espionne La France,” LEFIGARO, October 22, 2018, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2018/10/22/01003-20181022ARTFIG00245-etat-entreprises-comment-la-chine-espionne-la-france.php>.

102 Christophe Cornevin and Jean Chichizola, “Les révélations du Figaro sur le programme d'espionnage chinois qui vise la France,” LEFIGARO, October 22, 2018, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2018/10/22/01016-20181022ARTFIG00246-les-revelations-du-figaro-sur-le-programme-d-espionnage-chinois-qui-vise-la-france.php>.

103 Christophe Cornevin and Jean Chichizola, “Espionnage chinois : la note d'alerte des services secrets français,” <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2018/10/22/01003-20181022ARTFIG00305-espionnage-chinois-la-note-d-alerte-des-services-secrets.php>.

104 “Information About the Department of Justice's China Initiative and a Compilation of China-Related Prosecutions Since 2018,” July 31, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/nsd/information-about-department-justice-s-china-initiative-and-compilation-china-related>.

officers or the Chair of Harvard University's Chemistry and Chemical Biology Department.<sup>105</sup> The latter, Doctor Charles Lieber, was a lead nanoscience researcher, recipient of a \$15 million USD grant from the U.S. Department of Defense. Approached via China's well-known Thousand Talents program, Dr. Lieber also became a "Strategic Scientist" at Wuhan University of Technology, with an additional monthly income of \$50,000 USD.<sup>106</sup> According to FBI Director Christopher Wray, "the FBI opens a new China-related counterintelligence case nearly every 10 hours."<sup>107</sup> Ultimately, Mr. Wray underscores that "all of these seemingly inconsequential pressures add up to a policymaking environment in which Americans find themselves held over a barrel by the Chinese Communist Party."<sup>108</sup> Being held over a barrel is none other than a moderately subtle form of cognitive dominance.

These efforts at acquiring intelligence to better shape the understanding of the adversary have also been directly deployed in the Indo-Pacific, with successful recruitment of journalists in India, such as Rajeev Sharma<sup>109</sup> or meddling with politics in Australia, the most notorious case being the allegedly MSS-backed run for Parliament of the late Bo "Nick" Zhao in 2019.

Acquiring a better understanding of the adversary's cognitive process can now be increasingly achieved through big data analytics. These prove difficult in democratic societies, where extensive privacy laws restrict government access to data. The PRC, however, has recently enacted a broad and comprehensive "Personal Information Protection Law" (PIPL). Its terms are quite similar to the EU's General Data Protection Regulation, with one critical difference: it only applies to the handling of data by private entities. As indicated by Section III of the PIPL, "State organs handling

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105 Ibid.

106 "Harvard University Professor and Two Chinese Nationals Charged in Three Separate China Related Cases," January 28, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/harvard-university-professor-and-two-chinese-nationals-charged-three-separate-china-related>.

107 "The China Initiative: Year-in-Review (2019–20)," November 16, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/china-initiative-year-review-2019-20>.

108 "The Threat Posed by the Chinese Government and the Chinese Communist Party to the Economic and National Security of the United States," Speech, Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/the-threat-posed-by-the-chinese-government-and-the-chinese-communist-party-to-the-economic-and-national-security-of-the-united-states>.

109 Enforcement Directorate. "Press Release Regarding the Arrest of Rajeev Sharma." [enforcementdirectorate.gov.in](https://enforcementdirectorate.gov.in/sites/default/files/latestnews/Press_Release_Rajeev%20kumar_03_07_2021.pdf). 3 July 2021. [https://enforcementdirectorate.gov.in/sites/default/files/latestnews/Press\\_Release\\_Rajeev%20kumar\\_03\\_07\\_2021.pdf](https://enforcementdirectorate.gov.in/sites/default/files/latestnews/Press_Release_Rajeev%20kumar_03_07_2021.pdf)

personal information to fulfill their statutory duties and responsibilities shall conduct them according to the powers and procedures provided in laws or administrative regulations.”<sup>110</sup> These “laws” and “administrative regulations” are not referenced in PIPL, leaving the government with a free hand for data collection and analytics. In fact, a December 2021 investigation by the Washington Post unveiled massive PRC appropriations to support sweeping data collection abroad. The “review of bidding documents and contracts for over 300 Chinese government projects since the beginning of 2020 include orders for software designed to collect data on foreign targets from sources such as Twitter, Facebook, and other Western social media. [...] These surveillance dragnets are part of a wider drive by Beijing to refine its foreign propaganda efforts through big data and artificial intelligence.”<sup>111</sup> As candidly mentioned in the invitations, to bid, “through the collection of public Internet information we can keep a close eye on the international community, analyze sensitivities and hot spots, and maintain the stability of Chinese society.”<sup>112</sup> Simultaneous to these efforts aimed at acquiring overseas data, a CCP State Council mandate is requiring state-backed companies to migrate all their data from private cloud servers belonging to Alibaba or Tencent to “Guoziyun”—the “state asset cloud.” The companies have until September 2022 and are forbidden to sign any new data storage contracts with private companies.<sup>113</sup>

Digital data is not the only focus of the PRC’s drive for the most wide-spread information collection operation to date. Another fascinating example lies where it’s least expected: genetic information. Although this seems far more sensitive than fingerprints or social security records, it is currently far more vulnerable.<sup>114</sup> In fact, over 30% of the world’s

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110 Rogier Creemers and Graham Webster, “Translation: Personal Information Protection Law of the People’s Republic of China - Effective Nov. 1, 2021,” DIGICHINA, <https://digichina.stanford.edu/work/translation-personal-information-protection-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-effective-nov-1-2021/>.

111 Cate Cadell, “China Harvests Masses of Data on Western Targets, Documents Show,” *Washington Post*, accessed June 28, 2022, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/china-harvests-masses-of-data-on-western-targets-documents-show/2021/12/31/3981ce9c-538e-11ec-8927-c396fa861a71\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/china-harvests-masses-of-data-on-western-targets-documents-show/2021/12/31/3981ce9c-538e-11ec-8927-c396fa861a71_story.html).

112 Ibid.

113 “Tianjin Asks Govt Firms to Move Data out of Alibaba, Tencent Clouds-Document,” *Reuters*, August 27, 2021, sec. 公司新闻(英文), <https://www.reuters.com/article/china-regulation-cloud-idCNLI2NPY0T7>.

114 National Counterintelligence and Security Center, “China’s Collection of Genomic and other Healthcare Data from America: Risks to Privacy and U.S. Economic and National Security,” February 2021, [https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/NCSC\\_China\\_Genomics\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_2021revision20210203.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/NCSC_China_Genomics_Fact_Sheet_2021revision20210203.pdf).

genetic sequencing machines are in China.<sup>115</sup> More interestingly still, 8.4 million pregnant women across the world have resorted to the most distributed non-invasive prenatal genetic test: NIFTY, which is produced by a company now known as BGI Group.<sup>116</sup> Originally called “Beijing Genomics Institute,” it is based in Shenzhen, with branches in 66 countries. According to a 2021 Reuters investigation, “BGI developed and improved the test in collaboration with PLA hospitals. BGI uses the pregnant women’s genetic data for research into the traits of populations and collaborates with the PLA in other areas of research.”<sup>117</sup> Unsurprisingly, the terms and conditions of the U.S.-distributed NIFTY prenatal test stipulate the collected genetic information, which is exclusively stored in mainland China, will not be shared. Unless of course, it “is relevant to national security” or “public security.” Even broader, the fine print specifies that it can also be shared if it were to be “of significant public interest” or merely if “otherwise provided by applicable laws and regulations.”<sup>118</sup>

Centralized control and implementation of intelligence and data collection is thus incrementally, methodically, and vigorously enforced. The PRC’s understanding of its adversaries progresses at a rate only second to its advances in the development and training of Artificial Intelligence algorithms that this mass data enhances.

### *Manipulating the Adversary—Media, Social Media, and Disinformation*

Penetration of professional and social media platforms is not limited to the recruitment of agents and data collection purposes. Once cognitive understanding is thus enhanced, building off the extensive prior experience of their Russian counterparts, Chinese services then convert social and

115 Christina Czeschik, “Healthcare Cybersecurity in the EU and US: A Technical, Regulatory or Political Issue?,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://healthcare-in-europe.com/en/news/healthcare-cybersecurity-in-the-eu-us-a-technical-regulatory-or-political-issue.html>.

116 Kirsty Needham and Clare Baldwin, “China’s Gene Giant Harvests Data from Millions of Pregnant Women,” *Reuters*, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/health-china-bgi-dna/>.

117 Clare Baldwin and Kirsty Needham, “BGI Prenatal Gene Test under Scrutiny for Chinese Military Links | Reuters,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/bgi-prenatal-gene-test-under-scrutiny-chinese-military-links-2021-09-06/>.

118 “Privacy Policy,” The NIFTY™ Test—A Non-Invasive Prenatal Test Brought To By BGI Diagnostics, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.niftytest.com/privacy-policy/>.



conventional media outlets into tools of propaganda and disinformation. Or, to use the Chinese term, “public opinion guidance.”<sup>119</sup>

### **Shaping the Indo-Pacific’s Media Narratives**

Indeed, once it has been thoroughly understood and analyzed, foreign public opinion needs to be “guided,” to best support the PRC’s agenda. Since his first year in power, Xi Jinping has relentlessly insisted on the importance of “telling Chinese stories and spreading Chinese voices well.” He further developed his view of the media, stating that “storytelling is the best way to communicate internationally,” and that China “must strengthen international communication capabilities, enhance international discourse power, focus on telling Chinese stories, and optimize strategic layouts to build a flagship media with strong international influence.” The analysis behind the importance of propaganda is highly cultural, as testifies an op-ed written by Wang Shucheng, editor-in-chief of the Overseas Edition of the People’s Daily: “Those who fall behind will be beaten, those who are poor will starve, and those who are aphasic will be scolded. This is a profound conclusion drawn from the history of China since modern times. [...] Now, the problems of “beating” and “starving” in China have been resolved, but the problem of “scolding” has not been fundamentally resolved. [...] China’s development advantages and comprehensive national strength have not been transformed into discourse advantages. China’s image in the world is still largely shaped by others rather than by itself. Internationally, it is still in a situation where “reasons cannot be explained, words cannot be spread, and rumors cannot be heard.” The “deficit” between the inflow and outflow of information, the “contrast” between China’s real image and the subjective impression of the West, and the “gap” between soft power and hard power. The reason for this situation is mainly due to the “dislocation” in several aspects: one is the “cognitive dislocation” that solidifies China’s poverty and backwardness by “Western-centrism”; the second is the “value dislocation” in which the West uses its own values to judge China.”<sup>120</sup> The missions given to gray zone operations in the

119 “During the 30th collective study of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping emphasized strengthening and improving international communication work to demonstrate a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China,” Xinhuanet, accessed June 28, 2022, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-06/01/c\\_1127517461.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-06/01/c_1127517461.htm).

120 Wang Shucheng, “People’s Daily People’s Essentials: Fighting for the Right to Speak Internationally Is the Mission of Our Generation of Media Professionals,” accessed June 28, 2022, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1229/c1003-28984479.html>.



cognitive space are thus clearly delineated: acquire dominance in the international discourse, through the critical fields of cognition and values, to halt the “scolding.” This outreach spares no field. It is systematically applied to legacy, digital, and social media.

### **Legacy Media**

In the areas of great interest to the PRC’s state propaganda agenda, legacy media still holds a great audience. This is especially true since access to the internet is scarce, costly, and aligns well with China’s priority for South-South relationships. According to a 2020 study by the International Federation of Journalists, China is pursuing a “strategic, long-term effort to reshape the global news landscape with a China-friendly global narrative.”<sup>121</sup> Based on a survey ran in 58 countries across six regions including the Indo-Pacific, China uses four principal means to reach its objective.

First are journalism exchanges and training schemes, “outsourcing [China’s] influence operations to individual journalists.”<sup>122</sup> Although these invitations are twice as frequent in developing countries with ineffective and repressive governments, they also target “senior journalists from strategic developed countries.”<sup>123</sup> After such trips, organized by the Australian All China Journalist Association and the Asia Pacific Journalism Center, senior Australian reporters have written op-eds sounding very much like echo chambers of Chinese discourse on the BRI, the South China Sea or even on the nefarious influence of competing against China, thus restraining its massive investment plans in the fight against climate change. After a 10-month training program in China, 15 other journalists from the Indo-Pacific ended their tenure by “giving a glowing report,”<sup>124</sup> as the China Daily headlines read. Indeed, after a 10-month training program in China, Filipino journalist Gregggy Eugenio wrote: “I’ve learned that a state-owned government media is one of the most effective means of journalism. The media in China is still working well and people here appreciate

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121 “The China Story: Reshaping the World’s Media,” IJF Research Report on China and its Impact on Media 2020, [https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/IFJ\\_ChinaReport\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/IFJ_ChinaReport_2020.pdf).

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Alpha Daffae Senkpeni, “Visiting Journalists Give Glowing Report—AFRICA—Chinadaily.Com.Cn,” accessed June 28, 2022, [http://africa.chinadaily.com.cn/weekly/2017-12/08/content\\_35257660.htm](http://africa.chinadaily.com.cn/weekly/2017-12/08/content_35257660.htm).

their work.”<sup>125</sup> He then became the Online Manager of the Manila Bulletin, which then became the first Filipino news outlet to launch a Chinese online edition.

Second, comes the sharing of media content in the written and audio-visual press. Of the 58 surveyed countries, more than a third reported content sharing or co-creation agreements with Chinese media, most often for free. The China Daily Global Edition, often named “China Watch” is published in over a dozen countries, including Japan, Australia, New Zealand and—of course—both the United States and France. In fact, these content dissemination efforts are so prevalent in the United States that China Daily is the highest non-foreign government registered spender.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, the state-run English-language TV (China Global Television Network) and radio (CRI) channels are now broadcasting in over six Pacific Island Countries. In the Philippines, “China has partnered with almost the entire state media network, including People’s Television (PTV-4), Philippine News Agency (PNA), and radio Philippine Broadcasting Station (PBS).”<sup>127</sup>

Third, are China’s efforts to ensure its cognitive outreach through a less perceptible means: media acquisitions, joint ventures, and development of transmission infrastructure. As underlined by the IFJ survey, “China’s increasing influence in every stage of media from the means of production to the means of transmission allows greater possibilities to exert control over content, whether through outright censorship or more indirect methods such as pushing cheap satellite packages that include free Chinese state-run channels.”<sup>128</sup> The Chinese tech giant Ali Baba now owns major media companies, including Hong Kong’s South China Morning Post and Youku Tudou, China’s largest streaming platform. The latter has recently signed a major content sharing deal with the BBC, whose senior VP for

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125 Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, “Inside China’s Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign,” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping>.

126 At US\$20.8 million since 2017, according to an investigation by The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping>

127 Camille Elemia, “As PH, Cambodia Struggle for Press Freedom, China Amps up Influence,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/philippines-cambodia-struggle-press-freedom-china-amps-influence/>.

128 “The China Story: Reshaping the World’s Media.”

Commercial Operations and Strategy specified the BBC will be happy to help China “to explore overseas markets and to tell Chinese stories around the world.”<sup>129</sup> Although Ali Baba’s CEO Jack Ma’s tried to some extent to resist the CCP’s oversight, his company has since been brought “on the right path” in an effort to “purify the industry.” Now that its priorities have been rectified, Ali Baba has even pledged to contribute \$15.5 billion USD to Xi Jinping’s “common prosperity fund” by 2025<sup>130</sup>, thus ensuring the “essential requirement of socialism.”<sup>131</sup> On a smaller and more discreet scale, Chinese provincial governments are setting up joint ventures with media outlets of neighboring countries, such as Myanmar and Cambodia, thus ensuring effective control over the narrative. That the flashy offices of Cambodia’s Chinese-backed “NICE TV” are located directly on the fifth floor of the country’s Ministry of the Interior is, of course, no coincidence.<sup>132</sup> The local, but massive investment has already led to the shutdown of the independent Cambodian Daily, just as it has brought an end to Radio Free Asia and Voice of America broadcasts at the tip of the first island chain and the very heart of the South China Sea.

Fourth, and certainly not least, is an even more subtle line of effort, focusing on outreach to global journalism unions. According to the IFJ survey, over a third of the international respondents have been “approached by a Chinese entity to sign a Memorandum of Understanding.” Half of these have signed such a confidential agreement, including two countries in the Indo-Pacific and three in Europe. The IFJ further underscores that “signing MOUs with journalism unions is classic United Front strategy, a CCP tactic to coopt entities traditionally perceived as hostile or neutral.”<sup>133</sup>

Beyond the comprehensive and overarching means that are being deployed, Chinese-backed media also acquire market shares by building

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129 “Youku and BBC Studios Deepen Partnership for British Drama—Media Centre,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/bbcstudios/2020/youku-bbc-studios-partnership-british-drama>.

130 Reuters, “China’s Alibaba to Invest Billions by 2025 for ‘Common Prosperity,’” *The Guardian*, September 3, 2021, sec. Business, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/sep/03/china-alibaba-to-invest-billions-by-2025-for-common-prosperity>.

131 Fan Feifei, “Alibaba’s Investment to Help Promote Common Prosperity—Chinadaily.Com.Cn,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202109/03/WS61315b38a310efa1bd66d01a.html>.

132 David Boyle and Sun Narin, “Cambodia’s Nice New TV Channel from China,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-nice-new-tv-channel-from-china/4354124.html>.

133 “The China Story: Reshaping the World’s Media.”

upon customer's sensitivity in the realm of values. The media content focuses on positive news, responding to a longing of its target readers, who are overwhelmed by the Western focus on "negativity." On any given day, the headlines of the Chinese State news agency Xinhuanet's Asia-Pacific division showcases positive words such as "better," "happy," "success," "diverse," "advance" and "relief," thus securing an ever-greater audience.<sup>134</sup>

### **Digital and Social Media**

Mao Zedong was adamant about the advantages of third-party influence, which he imaginatively called "borrowing the boat to reach the ocean." In the ever-increasing fight to "command the trend," however, Chinese influence on legacy media seems moderately effective. It undeniably purveys a very positive image, regularly undermines anti-Chinese sentiment and activities, but lags in the ever-important effort of "influencing the local influencers." Of course, China's scope of cognitive influence isn't limited to legacy media. In fact, it only represents the tip of the iceberg. In our digitalized age, China's greatest cognitive campaign is being waged on digital and social media. Although they are banned in China, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube represent just several echoing chambers of China's "magic weapons"<sup>135</sup>: sock puppets, automated bots, and troll farms.

Although their efficacy is neither easy to direct nor to evaluate, social media platforms have become the hallmarks of malign influence, disinformation, polarization, and fueling of crises. They offer a high-yield, low-risk, and low-cost tool to further anyone's agenda. They are pernicious, incremental, deniable, and manipulative—the perfect tools of gray zone cognitive dominance. Purposefully and repetitively used by Russia and its infamous Internet Research Agency amongst others, they have been scaled by China to a whole new level. The human engagement efficiency and content quality of Chinese troll farms remains relatively low compared to their Russian counterparts. However, the unique combination of scale, data, manpower, and AI plays strongly on the availability bias, making them one of the greatest upcoming threats to cognitive sovereignty.

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134 "China-Asia&Pacific \_Asia&Pacific\_Xinhuanet," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://english.news.cn/asiapacific/2018/china-asia&pacific/index.htm>.

135 Anne-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping | Wilson Center," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping>.

These can be run both overtly and covertly. When overt, they rely on trend-creating media, diplomats, members of the Chinese diaspora, and private firms. When covert, they are often coordinated and implemented by the PLA's Strategic Support Force and its "Base 311," also known as unit 61716. Whatever the specific technical tools employed, Chinese-backed social media manipulation campaigns seek several cognitive outcomes:

- Generate a favorable perception of China and its socio-economic model
- Generate a negative perception of the Western socio-economic model
- Counter any anti-Chinese content or divert public attention from it
- Generate uncertainty and increase friction, by diluting the notions of truth and fact
- Increase polarization and generate panic, to better implement "divide and conquer."

According to an in-depth 2017 study for the American Political Science Association led by Harvard professor Gary King, "the Chinese government has long been suspected of hiring as many as 2,000,000 people to surreptitiously insert huge numbers of pseudonymous and other deceptive writings into the stream of real social media posts, as if they were the genuine opinions of ordinary people. [...] We estimate that the government fabricates and posts about 448 million social media comments a year."<sup>136</sup>

Laura Rosenberger, director of the Alliance for Securing Democracy, also underscores how the Covid pandemic has both dramatically increased Chinese efforts (+250% Tweets) and operated a shift from self-promotion to aggressive manipulation, using many of the tools more customarily attributed to Russian campaigns.<sup>137</sup>

China "has grown its audience share globally, maintaining centralization and control, through a different multi-pronged approach combining well-funded, overt state-run print, radio, and television media; a network of public-private partnerships; and a new generation of social media

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136 Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, "How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument," *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 3 (2017): 484-501.

137 Laura Rosenberger, "China's Coronavirus Information Offensive," June 23, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-04-22/chinas-coronavirus-information-offensive>.

influencers softening the CCP's image worldwide.”<sup>138</sup> Even though China's messages may not “go viral,” sustained and frequent messaging will undoubtedly have an impact on “reshaping societal perceptions about the truth and reality,” drowning out Democracy's voice.<sup>139</sup> The CCP's publicity department has developed a global media empire and has integrated social media into its plan. Using a network of social media propagandists, China is promoting their message globally, building rapport with other countries' populations, promoting a positive image of China, and countering the criticisms that China is receiving by promoting a counternarrative and political agenda.<sup>140</sup> These propaganda campaigns by the CCP attempt to coopt media influencers, academia, elected officials, government, and deter opposing narratives.<sup>141</sup> China's ability to control the strategic narrative through these campaigns has been increasingly effective. “China is using social media influencers to rewrite the past, author the present and dominate the future--pushing back democracy, by not one, but hundreds of photos and video clips at a time.”<sup>142</sup> They have been able to utilize their influence operations to create political power and aid in their rise.<sup>143</sup>

This operational shift is well demonstrated in what Graphika has named “operation Naval Gazing.”<sup>144</sup> In September 2020, Facebook “removed 155 accounts, 11 Pages, 9 Groups and 6 Instagram accounts for [...] coordinated inauthentic behavior on behalf of a foreign or government entity,” directly attributed to the Chinese government.<sup>145</sup> Over a 4-year time span, this coordinated operation relied on Facebook to disseminate disinformation regarding a great number of pressing geopolitical priorities, such

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138 Clint Watts, “China's Propaganda and Disinformation Landscape—2021 Snapshot,” Substack newsletter, *Selected Wisdom* (blog), November 19, 2021, <https://clintwatts.substack.com/p/chinas-propaganda-and-disinformation>.

139 Ibid.

140 Clint Watts, “‘The One Like One Share Initiative’—How China Deploys Social Media Influencers to Spread Its Message,” Substack newsletter, *Selected Wisdom* (blog), September 21, 2021, <https://clintwatts.substack.com/p/the-one-like-one-share-initiative>.

141 Garima Mohan, “Europe in the Indo-Pacific: A Case for More Coordination with Quad Countries,” The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 14 January 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/europe-indo-pacific-case-more-coordination-quad-countries>.

142 Watts, “The One Like One Share Initiative.”

143 Peter Mattis, “China's ‘Three Warfares’ in Perspective,” War on the Rocks, January 30, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>.

144 Ben Nimmo, C. Shawn Eib, and Lea Ronzaud, “Operation Naval Gazing,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://graphika.com/reports/operation-naval-gazing/>.

145 Nathaniel Gleicher, “Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior,” *Meta* (blog), September 22, 2020, <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/09/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-china-philippines/>.

as protests in Honk Kong, the independence of Taiwan, COVID-19, and contested U.S. naval operations in the South China Sea. What is more exceptional, however, is that over its lifespan, the operation incorporated an ever-more covert and manipulative agenda. It used covert assets and accounts, both in Asia and in the United States, to promote President Duterte and his family in the Philippines and President Widodo in Indonesia, shortly before the upcoming elections. These accounts also targeted U.S. domestic policy, incongruously voicing support for both Donald Trump and Joe Biden before the 2020 Presidential election. Although the social and cognitive outcome of the operation was rather limited (133,000 followers), it introduced several innovations, such as AI-generated images and profile pictures, English-language content, and extensive efforts to dissimulate fake accounts. It demonstrates a general trend with China's digital disinformation campaigns going global and covertly interfering in sovereign nations' domestic affairs.

Operations such as Naval Glazing appear to be aimed at developing and testing foreign influence and manipulation tools on social media. China's integrated disinformation and propaganda services now seem in the process of adapting domestically efficient techniques and technology to foreign audiences, while progressively incorporating major inputs from behavioral science. In an interview with the *Financial Times*, social media and behavioral science expert Paul Dabrowa shared his analysis of the most controversial Chinese media giant: TikTok. According to Dabrowa's research, TikTok uses positive and negative feedback loops to influence behavior on a somewhat Pavlovian model: "in practice the user would see a feed of people they are not necessarily linked to. Initially the videos would appear funny and generate positive emotions, at which point they would be directed to a propaganda video generated by the CCP, with the hope they would then share it. With repeated exposure the positive emotions will become subconsciously linked to the propaganda message in the same way a dog can be made to sit with food training. Over time children could be trained to associate positive emotions with political positions positive to the CCP or react negatively to positions negative to the CCP."<sup>146</sup>

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146 Izabella Kaminska, "Cognitive Hacking as the New Disinformation Frontier," *Financial Times*, August 17, 2020.



This signals a triple transition in China's malign influence efforts from: domestic to foreign, assertive discourse to covert cognitive influence, and self-serving praise to offensive overseas manipulation. This new paradigm also highlights China's foreign malign influence apparatus shortcomings in terms of effective user engagement overseas. Thus far, most accounts generate little real-life activity and fall short of the social media requirement of "going viral." This necessary upscaling in both quality and scope has now been considered by China's services, as recently demonstrated by a series of invitations to bid (ITBs) briefly published by the Shanghai Public Security Bureau, which were acquired and analyzed by the New York Times in December 2021.<sup>147</sup> Consistent with the recent evolution of China's influence campaigns, these ITBs indicate a far deeper understanding of social media influence dynamics. They require contractors to maintain "accounts that survive for a long period of time, have a certain number of fans, [and to] touch the ground for overseas social media accounts,"<sup>148</sup> to demonstrate familiarity "with recommendation algorithms" and to create original content. These coherent measures ensure the best rate of public engagement, patiently building efficient and sophisticated tools of mass influence.

Control and coordination of these efforts leaves nothing to chance. During a June 2021 meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Xi Jinping stressed that the Party "effectively carried out international public opinion guidance and public opinion struggle; and constructed a rudimentary multi-body, three-dimensional pattern of foreign propaganda."<sup>149</sup>

### **Influencing Civic Independence Movements**

In some specific cases, China's efforts of "international public opinion guidance" and "public opinion struggle" conflate into one continuum. Amongst these instances is China's covert support of several independence movements in the Indo-Pacific. The French Military Institute of Strategic Research has recently published an extensive study of Chinese influence,

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147 Muyi Xiao, Paul Mozur, and Gray Beltran, "Buying Influence: How China Manipulates Facebook and Twitter," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2021, sec. Technology, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/12/20/technology/china-facebook-twitter-influence-manipulation.html>.

148 Ibid.

149 "During the 30th collective study of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping emphasized strengthening and improving international communication work to demonstrate a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China."



where it highlights two such efforts. The first is aimed at Okinawa, jeopardizing Japanese and American interests. The second was aimed at New Caledonia, thus directly threatening French equities in the region.

The Okinawan Islands, also known as the Ryukyus, are historically and ethnically distinct from the rest of Japan. For many centuries, they have been under PRC domination. After formal annexation by Japan in 1879 brought an end to the semi-autonomous Ryukyu monarchy, a strong sense of Japanese superiority bred strong resentment amongst Okinawans. Adding to the fact that Okinawa is the Eastern gateway to the East China Sea and that it hosts 75% of the U.S. military stationed in Japan, this volatile historical perspective has been carefully articulated by China. As noted by Dr. Robert Eldridge, “there is an increasingly emboldened independence movement. It is important to note that it is foreign agents and the countries they come from—in particular, China—that actively support and promote the independence movement in Okinawa. The “Ryukyuan” independence movement, in turn, also works with other independence movements, such as those in Hawaii and Guam, which are similarly important geo-strategic locations.”<sup>150</sup> Through media public opinion guidance, Chinese malign influence seeks to tear at the Okinawan seams. According to the Japanese Public Security Intelligence Agency, Chinese operatives approached Ryukyu independence groups,<sup>151</sup> while state-owned media routinely question Japanese sovereignty over the islands, encouraging the use of their historical name of Ryukyu, and promoting both independence and removal of U.S. bases. Even apparently benign tourism features in state-affiliated China Daily underlines “the feeling that Okinawa is closer to China than to Japan, manifested by Naha’s food, culture and architecture, remains to this day. The mainland Japanese who have moved here are referred to as immigrants by locals.”<sup>152</sup> In fact, any event capable of turning Okinawa’s population against the central Japanese government or U.S. servicemembers is systematically brought to attention by Chinese

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150 “Public Security Intelligence Agency Report Claims Ryukyu-China Programs Aim to Divide Country,” *Ryukyu Shimpo—Okinawa, Japanese Newspaper, Local News* (blog), accessed June 28, 2022, <http://english.ryukyushimpo.jp/2017/02/04/26418/>.

151 Ibid.

152 Wang Xu, “Japanese Island a Paradise for Thrill Seekers—Travel—Chinadaily.Com.Cn,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202010/03/WS5f77ce4da31024ad0ba7d17a.html>.

media outlets.<sup>153</sup> As underlined in an in-depth analysis of Chinese influence in Japan carried out by the U.S. CSIS, “Japan’s main security concern is the possibility of Okinawa declaring independence, in part due to its grievances against Tokyo and Washington. China encourages this objective through diplomacy, disinformation, and investments in the northern part of the island near the U.S. bases.”<sup>154</sup>

Major French equities in the Indo-Pacific are similarly threatened at the slightest opportunity by China’s gray zone influence operations. As per the provisions of the Noumea Treaty, New Caledonia had the responsibility of organizing 3 auto-determination referendums over a period of 4 years. All three would require a “NO” result for New Caledonia to remain French. Conversely, had a single of the three referendums yielded a majority of “YES” votes, New Caledonia would have become independent. The first two referendums were held in 2018 (56.7% NO) and 2020 (53.3% NO). Sensing a vulnerability of this key territory, China quickly realized how much it had to gain from the Island’s potential independence: counter-containment, strategic proximity to Australia, and access to some of the world’s greatest nickel reserves. As the third referendum approached, China strengthened its traditional overseas influence approach: foster personal relationships with key individuals, widen the network through “associations of friendship” and Confucius institutes, and invest into key economic sectors.

In New Caledonia, the cornerstone of this process was the “Association of Chinese-Caledonian Friendship.” As early as 2017, it had invited senior Chinese delegates, including China’s ambassador to France and New Caledonia. Pursuing its interpersonal relationships with independence leaders, the Association had two of its key members successively hold the position of Chief of Staff to Mr. Roch Wamytan, President of the New Caledonian Congress. According to Bastien Vandendyck, a French political scientist focused on the Indo-Pacific, this “Association is merely a pro-Shanghai lobby. It serves the purpose of creating a network of

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153 Wang Qi, “Biden Tests Japan’s Loyalty at Virtual Summit, but ‘Disagreements Remain to Be Solved’—Global Times,” accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202201/1246603.shtml>.

154 Devin Stewart, “China’s Influence in Japan: Everywhere Yet Nowhere in Particular,” July 2020, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200722\\_Stewart\\_GEC\\_FINAL\\_v2%20UPDATED.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200722_Stewart_GEC_FINAL_v2%20UPDATED.pdf).

individuals supporting China's increasing role within Caledonian independence movements. China has placed its pawns in New Caledonia, in what is a long-term strategy."<sup>155</sup> Meanwhile, on the economic front, elements of the Chinese diaspora in New Caledonia have extensively invested in stores and restaurants. More importantly still, the PCC-linked Jinchuan Group created a major mining joint-venture with the Caledonian South Pacific Mining Company.

The third and final auto-determination referendum also yielded a vote against independence,<sup>156</sup> despite what French Intelligence identified as China's support "for pro-independence Kanak movements, aiming to influence the [...] December 12th, 2021, referendum."<sup>157</sup> Despite China's efforts, this last vote has concluded the Noumea Process, under the watchful eye of the UN Committee on Decolonization (C24). France must now devise New Caledonia's revised constitutional status within the French Republic, which will need to be approved by a new referendum before 2023. This thorough and transparent process led by France, along with strict control of foreign influence and investments, proves that a policy of "filling the void" can efficiently curtail Chinese "soft" and "sharp power" efforts.

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155 "New Caledonia: a French asset coveted by China," TV5MONDE, December 8, 2021, <https://information.tv5monde.com/info/nouvelle-caledonie-un-atout-francais-convoite-par-la-chine-435703>.

156 The landslide result, with 96.5% in favor of New Caledonia remaining French, is caused amongst others by a boycott of the election by pro-independence constituents against a COVID-19 backdrop.

157 "Chinese influence in the Pacific: what consequences for France?" Nemrod ECDS En Jeux Contemporains De Defense et de Securite, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://nemrod-ecds.com/?p=5676>.



## 3. Part III—Roadmap toward 2049

### 3.1. Reinventing the North Atlantic’s Oldest Alliance

The challenge China poses with their authoritarian regime and intent to export an authoritarian governance globally, is inconsistent with democratic objectives. When countries act clearly and lay out the rules of the road, you cannot affect their behavior in hopes they will change, but you can lay out rules that if followed, are more conducive to advancing their interests. President Xi Jinping believes in socialism and the need to deliver an economy that provides for the Chinese people. As Xi recognizes the importance of having a people-focused plan, he also recognizes it is the primary obstacle in achieving a socialist order with Chinese characteristics. At the 19th Central Committee of the CCP, he identified “the principal contradiction facing Chinese society in the new era is that between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life, and the Party must therefore remain committed to a people-centered philosophy of development, develop whole-process people’s democracy, and make more notable and substantive progress toward achieving well-rounded human development and common prosperity for all.”<sup>1</sup> One of his biggest challenges in this need is the gap between per capita income and the GDP. Creating a system that enables this gap to be closed opens the opportunity for China to cooperate, while adhering to the international norms and system. If they do not adhere to these norms, their progress will be derailed and lead to their isolation.

As both France and the United States have strong interests in the region, both should focus on setting conditions economically, militarily, informationally, and diplomatically, that are conducive to advancing both of their national interests and common strategic vision in the region. It is necessary to have a collective approach to set these conditions with like-minded

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1 The State Council The People’s Republic of China, “Xi: Principal Contradiction Facing Chinese Society Has Evolved in New Era,” accessed June 28, 2022, [http://english.www.gov.cn/news/top\\_news/2017/10/18/content\\_281475912458156.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/news/top_news/2017/10/18/content_281475912458156.htm).

nations in a coherent and aligned response. U.S. and French leadership are in unique positions to create alignments in our alliances in the diplomatic, information, political, and economic spaces. The broader the approach, the more likely there will be a natural alignment of interest into actions that complement each other. The differences the democratic world has with China must be solved peacefully. There cannot be an “or else” type of mentality. Even China recognizes that engaging in war will have a detrimental effect on the progress they have made in overcoming their Century of Humiliation and strive to avoid conflict. A focus on specific structures and actions that can be taken to compliment where we can advance our democratic interests, deter conflict in the region, prevent U.S. and Chinese friction, and create a stable environment with compromise on both sides is in the best interest of the United States, France, China, and the international community.

With high stakes in the Indo-Pacific, both the United States and France have laid out their own strategy in competing with China in the region. Both countries seek to pursue a democratic, secure, and free and open system in the Indo-Pacific, but neither strategy details collaboration with the other nation—a gap that needs to be overcome. As described in the U.S.’ Interim National Security Strategy, the alliances, norms, and international order that have been established are being threatened by authoritarian governments like China. Thus, it is vitally important and a national priority for the United States to “reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships around the world,” and “embrace bold initiatives that bring like-minded states and influential non-state actors together in new ways.”<sup>2</sup> Now is the time to act and break free of our historical mentality limiting the way we operate and view the international system. “France has a clearly articulated Indo-Pacific strategy that aims to support a ‘stable, multipolar order’ in a region that is not dominated by one country.”<sup>3</sup> As both countries focus efforts and resources on similar mutual interests and lines of effort, it is time to look at revitalizing the world’s oldest alliance and seek collaborative options to include each other in their own strategies and leverage each other’s often offset strengths.

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2 President Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance,” March 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

3 Garima Mohan, “NSC-1v2.Pdf,” accessed November 28, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>. The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 14 January 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/europe-indo-pacific-case-more-coordination-quad-countries>.

## 3.2. Diplomacy, Economy, Information, and Security: Imperatives of Collaboration, Coordination, and Consultation

The first French senior officer to join the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War was Gilbert Motier de Lafayette. Very much like his American counterparts, he was driven by the idea that “no obstacle, no disappointment, no sorrow will distract or stifle the pursuit of life’s only objective: the well-being of all and liberty everywhere.” No two countries have historically shared a closer worldview than the United States and France, fighting side by side, century after century, and continent after continent for the safeguarding of likewise cherished values. These are enshrined in the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, whose foundational wording has directly inspired the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man, a mere six years after the Treaty of Paris formally recognized American independence, thereby also catalyzing the French Revolution.

And yet, the Indo-Pacific is both a new challenge and the greatest opportunity for this oldest of alliances. As demonstrated above, the United States and France are the only two western countries with extensive territorial, human, military, and strategic equities in this region, which is destined to become the world’s next geostrategic *heartland*. China’s model and its increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific exercises an unprecedented strain on the ideals and vital interests of both France and the United States. Finally, as has been in modern history’s greatest challenges, the United States and France need to leverage each other’s strengths and convictions to rise to a yet unmet challenge.

Quite naturally, U.S. and French priorities, objectives, and ways and means differ in many regards. Aiming toward a comprehensive and single-bodied alliance would be illusory, inefficient, and in many regards—detrimental. Almost all Indo-Pacific nations face the terrible conundrum of having their security ensured by the greatest competitor of their economic guarantor and geographic neighbor. Favoring one alienates the other, breaching either the sense of safety or the prospect of livelihood. In this bipolar environment,

France seeks to rally the EU to offer an alternative model. It remains grounded in realism and acknowledges the threat but attempts to refrain from confronting it. Rather than engaging in ruthless competition and becoming an additional spoke in America's power wheel, France and the EU hope to provide a convening alternative, allowing Indo-Pacific states' allegiance to the values of freedom and democracy without necessarily antagonizing China: a "third path" forward.<sup>4</sup> As noted by French scholar Celine Pajon, this fulcrum role is further supported by "the beauty of the "Indo-Pacific" as a geopolitical construct, [which] lies in its polymorphic, flexible nature that helps create coalitions of the willing and enable coordination without antagonizing effects."<sup>5</sup> Pushing forth their idea of "strategic autonomy," France and the EU remain deeply convinced that "multilateralism, which involves all stakeholders, is the best framework in which to reduce tensions and encourage cooperative approaches, rather than operating via blocks."<sup>6</sup>

Despite these differences in the process architecture, the ultimate goals of both France and the United States, as outlined in their respective Indo-Pacific strategies, are remarkably similar: bolstering regional security; building both physical and digital connectivity; ensuring a free, safe, and open Indo-Pacific; and supporting regional prosperity, common goods, resilience, freedom, and rule of law. In a notable shift from the isolationist approach heralded by President Trump, the Biden Administration's February 2022 strategy explicitly acknowledges this convergence of objectives, underscoring that "like France, we recognize the strategic value of an increasing regional role for the EU. Much like the EU [...] American strategy will be principled, long-term, and anchored in democratic resilience."<sup>7</sup> Pushing the rhetoric even farther amidst the AUKUS fallout, both Presidents Biden and Macron have jointly stated they "share a commitment to systematic and in-depth consultation and coordination" and they

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4 Ministère De L'Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères, *France's Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*, [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_16p\\_2021\\_v4\\_cle4b8b46.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a4_indopacifique_16p_2021_v4_cle4b8b46.pdf).

5 Celine Pajon, "AUKUS, the Indo-Pacific, and France's Role: Fluctuat Nec Mergitur," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/publications-ifri/articles-ifri/aukus-indo-pacific-and-frances-role-fluctuat-nec>.

6 Ministère De L'Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères, *France's Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*.

7 "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States," The White House, February 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.



“recognize the importance of robust collaboration in the Indo-Pacific, particularly given the growing economic and strategic challenges there.”<sup>8</sup>

Given this thorough convergence of both values and goals, the United States and France should systematically focus on outcomes. All actions in the diplomatic, economic, security, and informational realms should fall under one of three processes: collaboration, coordination, or consultation. Collaboration should allow to aggregate all positive-sum actions, which are at no risk of inefficiency by outrightly antagonizing China. Coordination must be exercised for all zero-sum actions, where the often complementary stance, assets and acceptance of the United States, the EU, and France can be mutually leveraged for greater final value. Consultation must prevail in those few issues where a common position cannot be agreed on, to avoid undermining the partners’ locally divergent agenda, and to preserve the indispensable notions of common unity and resolve.

### **3.3. Collaboration: Positive-Sum Outputs**

In the diplomatic realm, the most straightforward field of wide-spectrum collaboration lies in the support and safeguard of common rules, norms, human rights, democratic institutions, and good governance. This naturally applies to the abidance by law in the maritime domain, which would effectively require the United States to ratify UNCLOS, to guarantee unambiguous cooperation in defending FON and maritime sovereignty against the many efforts of Chinese incremental annexation. The United States, France, and the EU also need to fully collaborate on calling out all human rights violations since jointly underscoring the inconsistencies of China’s model and the violations of its self-portrayed values will strengthen the resolve and wariness of Indo-Pacific partners. The latter also requires collaborative and broad support in developing and strengthening their democratic resilience, allowing them to make political choices that will be free, informed, and uncoerced. Protecting the Indo-Pacific against foreign malign interference, influence, and disinformation should be listed high on a joint French-U.S. agenda for the region.

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8 “United States-France Joint Statement,” The White House, October 29, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/29/united-states-france-joint-statement/>.

## Transnational Threat Collaboration

The United States, EU, and France should also collaboratively address the mitigation of all transnational threats to the region. Terrorism, non-proliferation, climate change, environmental protection, humanitarian assistance, pandemic and disaster relief, health, common goods, and sustainable governance can and should all be addressed jointly to produce strong, positive-sum outcomes for the region. Throughout these numerous challenges, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) holds a central position for both the United States and France in the Indo-Pacific. Both countries should thus build a collaborative agenda in their partnerships with ASEAN, demonstrating the highest common interest, their unwavering unity, and an exceptional leverage.

## Economic Collaboration

It is perhaps the economic realm that offers the greatest perspectives for fields of constructive and seamless collaboration between the United States and the EU, driven by the French Indo-Pacific initiative. The similar economic weight of both actors endows them with the exceptional power to strengthen free-market democracies, while providing an attractive, safe, and uncontentious alternative to Chinese economic hegemony. France, the EU, and the United States should closely collaborate in all efforts aiming to secure resilient regional economies, diverse value chains, human and infrastructure connectivity, and jointly developed regulations. As underlined by a 2022 study of the German Marshall Fund, “breaking the exchanges out of their old silos has been helpful—a reflection of the growing mutual recognition that alignment on technology regulation, supply chains and infrastructure finance may prove far more important in the long-term competition with China than strongly worded joint statements about China itself.”<sup>9</sup>

Powerful and meaningful economic collaboration between the United States, France, and the EU should also encompass joint economic sanction packages, joint investment screening, and joint protection of intellectual and

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9 Andrew Small, Bonnie Glaser, and Garima Mohan, “Closing the Gap: US-European Cooperation on China and the Indo-Pacific,” February 2022, <https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Small%20et%20al%20-%20China%20Indo-Pacific%20-%20paper%20NEW.pdf>.

academic property. The scope of economic collaboration should include the development of innovative and common standards for the regulation of international trade, industrial strategy, export control, data management, and technology ethics. The U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC)<sup>10</sup>, launched in 2021, offers the ideal forum for these collaborative actions to be developed further and should be consistently leveraged by both the United States and the EU. Presidents Biden and Macron defined the TTC as the “forum for enabling the United States and the EU to update the rules of the road for the 21st Century economy.”<sup>11</sup> More importantly, the implementation of sustainable, fair, and transparent standards for international trade and labor should be achieved by reviving the TPP. Not only should the United States reap the domestic and regional benefits of the TPP, but it should also be restored as an even more ambitious agreement, incorporating the EU. Such a new and expanded TPP would represent the World’s largest trade agreement, not only offering considerable economic benefits, but also creating great geostrategic leverage, thereby strongly inducing China to comply with fair and sustainable international norms. Owing to the same idea of providing a better alternative to Chinese coercive practices, the EU and United States should closely collaborate in the field of Indo-Pacific infrastructure investment. The G7’s, U.S.-led, 40 trillion USD “Build Back Better World” (B3W) and the EU’s 300 billion USD “Global Gateway” projects provide credible and attractive alternatives to China’s BRI and its debt-trap diplomacy.<sup>12</sup> These two initiatives, led by the world’s largest economies could provide even greater global value if they were to overcome the imperatives of dissociated branding and be developed and implemented in a deeply collaborative manner.

## Freedom of Navigation Collaboration

As China pushes to become the regional hegemon in Asia, attempts to build leverage over other Asian states, and drive out the United States and their alliances, “China has been less successful in its efforts to position itself as the region’s preeminent security actor, a role long played by

10 “U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC),” *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-eu-trade-and-technology-council-ttc/>.

11 “United States-France Joint Statement,” October 29, 2021.

12 “FACT SHEET: President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership.”

the United States.”<sup>13</sup> The United States has maintained long-time security alliances in the region, disrupting China’s strategy to become the regional hegemon. Regional security is one of the primary and potentially most significant areas of cooperation that can be achieved in ensuring a free and open region. Enhancing security capabilities in the region directly impact the ability to ensure nations’ sovereignty, FON, securing sea lines of communication (SLOCs), and deterring military escalation resulting in conflict. Maritime security and FON are also critical to the economic security of the region and upholding the liberal economy of the current international order. “As more than half of global shipping tonnage traverse the South China Sea, which is also vital for over 80 percent of oil imports to Japan and South Korea, the great power that controls this region ‘will dominate . . . Southeast Asia and play a decisive role in the future of the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean.’”<sup>14</sup> Security of sea lanes in the region is a global concern as the importance of the regional waterways has elevated as trade in the region and exports transiting the region have expanded. This calls for increased competition in the maritime domain to aid in FONOPs.<sup>15</sup>

The United States has pushed to ensure the area remains free and open and to “protect political, security, and economic interest in the region” by “conducting FONOPs, and bolstering support for Southeast Asian partners.”<sup>16</sup> In parallel to this, France has also been primarily focused on the maritime domain as their “interest in the region is overwhelmingly focused on the sea,” have stated they “will continue to exercise its freedom of movement wherever law allows it,” and have demonstrated this point by deploying “ships from continental France to the South China Sea at least twice a year since 2014 and to the Taiwan Strait.”<sup>17</sup> As both countries are so highly focused on ensuring FON in the region and sovereign interests, it is conducive for them to work together to enhance security in the region. “The U.S. and France should maximize the habits of security cooperation

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13 Economy, “Xi Jinping’s New World Order.”

14 Ogden, *China and India*, 119.

15 Garima Mohan, “Europe in the Indo-Pacific: A Case for More Coordination with Quad Countries,” The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 14 January 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/europe-indo-pacific-case-more-coordination-quad-countries>.

16 “Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea,” Global Conflict Tracker, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>.

17 Lohman, “The U.S. and France Should Double Down on Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

and interoperability that they have developed elsewhere in the world in the North Atlantic, in the Fifth Fleet area of operations, but also in the African Sahel.”<sup>18</sup> The most effective way to accomplish this is by focusing on where their priorities overlap and enhancing their presence in the region. “This means first, the Western Pacific and Eastern Indian Ocean. Secondly, it means an increased French presence in the Northwestern Pacific, a greater U.S. presence in the South Pacific, and closer coordination of activity in each area.”<sup>19</sup> Collaborating in regard to areas of overlap and operations encompasses larger coverage by the two countries and diversifies the posture of like-minded nations working toward the same common goal.

As China continues to act in their own interest in the region, it continues to drive an increase in nations working together to secure the region. “China’s behavior has also reenergized the Quad partnership, which includes Australia, India, Japan, and the United States; spurred the establishment of a new trilateral security pact among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; and prompted several European countries, including France, Germany, and the Netherlands, along with NATO, to deepen their security engagement in the Asia-Pacific.”<sup>20</sup> As regional actors in the Indo-Pacific realize China’s intent and the negative impacts it may have on their own future, some such as Japan, have demonstrated their willingness to go against China when they “warned of the growing threat posed by China and Russian collaboration and said it was necessary to ‘wake up’ to Beijing’s pressure on Taiwan and protect the island as a ‘democratic country.’”<sup>21</sup> The United States, France, and other like-minded nations such as Japan must continue to set the stage through public collaboration, drawing in more like-minded partners.

## Regional Military Collaboration

Regional military collaboration is the best way to enhance coordination of effort. As both militaries hold multiple military exercises in the region, “one indispensable way to develop the necessary procedures, protocols,

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18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Economy, “Xi Jinping’s New World Order.”

21 Reuters, “Japanese Minister Says Taiwan Must Be Protected ‘as a Democratic Country,’” CNN, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/29/asia/japan-taiwan-defense-intl-hnk/index.html>.

and precedents for cooperating in the Indo-Pacific is by actually exercising and operating together.”<sup>22</sup> Collaboration in these exercises should cover not only contingency, but also military operations other than war, such as HADR. One example of this is France’s Croix-du-Sud exercise that they hold every two years in New Caledonia, which is focused on HADR. Historically, the United States has had a minimal footprint in this exercise that includes an array of East and South Asian nations. Enhancing U.S. cooperation not only increases collaboration with France, but also opens doors to increased relations with other Asian states and the ability to identify their major concerns and needs in the region. Additionally, as General Charles Flynn, the Commanding General of U.S. Army Pacific, highlighted, a way for democratic countries to demonstrate their value in the region is being able to respond to things that Asian nations care about such as overcoming natural disasters and bringing resources that matter to the nations like water, power, food, and infrastructure; ultimately taking care of their people and creating an environment for them to have human security and the ability to develop economically and diplomatically. Multilateral military exercises and combined training open the door to bring countries together and foster these relationships.

Another critical aspect of maintaining them is having a persistent presence throughout the region. A persistent presence continues to develop the relationships between nations, enhances degrees of interoperability, but also demonstrates a commitment to the nations. Implementing a persistent presence in these locations could be accomplished through forward stationing forces, which requires a heavier footprint and more resources, or more ideally, deployment of rotational forces and prepositioning assets.<sup>23</sup> Enhancing force posture in the region “should not only involve permanent bases but should increasingly include a variety of access and status of forces agreements” that can also aid in “diversifying military posture to ‘low-cost, small footprint’ facilities” that provide “the ability to respond nimbly to faraway regional crises.”<sup>24</sup>

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22 Lohman, “The U.S. and France Should Double Down on Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

23 Interview with General Charles Flynn, Harvard Kennedy School of Government, 16 November 2021.

24 Doshi, *The Long Game*.

## Intelligence Sharing

Another area to enhance security in the region is in information and intelligence sharing. As both the United States and France can enhance their collaborative efforts, information and intelligence sharing is a critical part of this effort. As both nations work toward the same strategic vision, opening avenues of more transparent communication on operations, intentions, and threats increases interoperability and security. Intelligence collaboration improves the analysis of raw information and intelligence through diverse views and expertise resulting in a more effective means to increase security. The United States and France has an intelligence sharing platform, the interagency Lafayette Committee, which was established in 2016 after the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks charged to share operational intelligence in theaters where they are engaged together.<sup>25</sup> Even though there is already a platform in place for the United States and France to share intelligence, it “consists largely of the periodic sharing of intelligence assessments, not raw intelligence.”<sup>26</sup> There is a big difference in sharing intelligence assessments versus raw intelligence with the biggest being the timing in which each country is able to access the information the other is sharing. This time difference can inhibit opportunities for the two countries to operate together or take advantage of an opportunity before a window closes, especially in a time of globalization where people are able to receive information and act within minutes. The United States and France should look at enhancing the interagency Lafayette Committee to expand the information and intelligence they share and incorporate it through all levels: tactical, operational, and strategic. Another potential option to enhance information sharing is by including France in the traditional “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance. As the United States is already looking to include India, Japan, South Korea, and Germany to enhance their intelligence sharing to better compete with China, it may also be an opportunity to do the same with France.

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25 Lohman, “The U.S. and France Should Double Down on Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

26 Ibid.



### 3.4. Coordination: Zero-Sum Outputs

The principle of “reactive devaluation” sets forth that we tend to disparage proposals made by an antagonizing messenger. Caught in the crossfires of China’s and America’s great power competition, many Indo-Pacific states know this principle all too well. Similarly, France’s historic colonialism in the region may be an area of contention as well. There are fields where outright French-U.S. collaboration would therefore be detrimental. Separation in branding, despite commonness of goals, might allow for the creation of greater terminal utility. This process is nonetheless costly in both time and resources, mandating a great amount of close coordination and an offset leveraging of complementary strengths.

#### Diplomatic Coordination

In the diplomatic realm, coordination should occur from the onset of all and any bilateral or regional agreements the United States, France, or the EU. This includes broadening the regional ties of the Quad, bilateral cooperation with major partners such as India, Japan, Australia, the ROK, the Philippines or Malaysia, partnering with Pacific Island States, implementing regional initiatives, or meaningfully strengthening the diplomatic presence in the region. Similarly, any direct engagement with China by the United States, France, or the EU will achieve greater efficiency if coordinated beforehand. As stated by the GMF, “as the only economic actor on a comparable scale to the United States and China, the EU is by far the most important potential partner for Washington in addressing a wide spectrum of trade and economic policy issues with Beijing on a coordinated basis.”<sup>27</sup> Whether in relations with regional partners or in confrontation with China, the best yield for the United States might be achieved by leveraging an offset approach through France or the EU, thus offering a more “positive framing” and minimizing the reactive devaluation effect. This approach can be further leveraged by resorting to track two diplomacy, to diffuse tensions and reduce pushback.

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27 Andrew Small, Bonnie Glaser, and Garima Mohan, “Closing the Gap: US-European Cooperation on China and the Indo-Pacific.”

## Strategic Competition Coordination

Until recently, it was striking how both the United States on the one hand and France and the EU on the other have systematically discounted the other party's role in the Indo-Pacific and in facing the challenges posed by China. This phenomenon was further amplified by the uncertainties regarding U.S. foreign policy and protectionist fears on both sides of the Atlantic. For efficient action in the Indo-Pacific, these sources of friction need to be mitigated by extensive coordination on often divergent regulatory issues such as technology, data, privacy, and labor. These measures of coordination also need to be extended to more “tactical” issues, such as the protection of American and European domestic industrial interests or the perceived mutually exclusive provision of capital and technology to China. And yet, it is perhaps in the public-private business dichotomy that lies the CCP's greatest vulnerability, where “Xi faces a dilemma familiar to all authoritarian regimes: how to tighten central political control without extinguishing business confidence and dynamism.”<sup>28</sup> Coordinated entrepreneurial actions might thus exacerbate the CCP's conundrum, leveraging it to adopt more open and legitimate business practices.

Conversely, uncoordinated negotiation of agreements such as the (now stalled) EU's Comprehensive Agreement on Investment<sup>29</sup> or the United States' role in AUKUS can only be strategically detrimental, identifying fragile seams at which an ill-intended China could be tempted to pull even harder. Long-term imperatives mandate for a coordinated approach in the various and sometimes diverging facets of competition with China. Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd underscored that “for the first time in many decades, the United States will soon require the combined heft of its allies to maintain an overall balance of power against an adversary. China will keep trying to peel countries away from the United States—such as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom—using a combination of economic carrots and sticks.”<sup>30</sup> Now is

28 Kevin Rudd, “How to Keep U.S.-Chinese Confrontation from Ending in Calamity,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2021, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-05/kevin-rudd-usa-chinese-confrontation-short-of-war>.

29 “Key elements of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement,” Text, European Commission—European Commission, accessed June 28, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/ip\\_20\\_2542](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/ip_20_2542).

30 Rudd, “How to Keep U.S.-Chinese Confrontation from Ending in Calamity.”

not the time to underestimate coordination, which must also be extended to include the respective agendas and actions of France, the EU, and the United States in multinational organizations. Securing key positions within the UN, strengthening participation in the WTO, the World Bank, and IMF, as well as continuing to upgrade transatlantic consultations on the Indo-Pacific and China to cabinet or summit levels is vital. In a very realist approach to “managed strategic competition” with China, Kevin Rudd also pointedly advocates for the development of commonly agreed and coordinated guardrails—a set of key issues and their associated red lines, upon which the United States and EU should most definitely agree before launching a coordinated negotiation with China.

## Security Coordination

With both the United States and France focusing on the Indo-Pacific, and increasing and diversifying their presence throughout the region, not only can they collaborate in multilateral exercises, training, and operations, but they can also coordinate their presence throughout the region to enhance security more broadly. “Looking at this from the PRC’s perspective, the ability of United States, allied, and partner forces to successfully execute dispersed operations presents a daunting dilemma. [...] Taken together, the benefits of direct, frequent, and persistent personal interaction—trust, understanding of the operating environment, interoperability—all enable operational maneuver and sustainment by contributing to reliable and consistent airspace, facilities, and equipment necessary to successfully conduct dispersed operations.”<sup>31</sup> Diversifying posture and dispersing forces aids in overcoming China’s A2/AD capabilities in the region and their control of sea lanes, enhances security, and leads to other economic and diplomatic opportunities in the region.

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31 Lt Gen Jon Thomas, “Bases, Places, and Faces: Operational Maneuver and Sustainment in the Indo-Pacific Region > Air University (AU) > Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs Article Display,” accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2565134/bases-places-and-faces-operational-maneuver-and-sustainment-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

### 3.5. Consultation: Positive Output Despite Disagreement

Whether cooperation is planned through official or parallel channels, a certain number of fundamental differences of appreciation will always remain. The United States seeks to preserve its leading role in the international community, which elevates China to the status of a strategic threat. France and the EU seek to prone their “strategic autonomy” and to secure itself a determining role in the global balance of power, which in turn necessarily entails to transcend the apparent division of the world between two global and rival powers.

#### Different Worldviews

This fundamental divergence was outlined by the French Foreign Minister, M. Le Drian, in a hearing before the Defense Commission of the French parliament in October 2021: “the United States approach the current situation in the Indo-Pacific with quite a confrontational prism, whereas the French and European strategies are far more open: they factor in the risk, but they go beyond it. [...] France seeks to loosen the vise and to demonstrate that an alternate path is possible in every domain. [...] This path fully assumes the brokerage of power, including using military force, but always seeks to avoid playing into the further development of tensions and conflict.”<sup>32</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the greatest rifts between France and the United States appear in the prospective use of power, both in the realms of security and trade. France has repeatedly underscored that it doesn’t consider China to be part of the North Atlantic space and that it is therefore not an issue within the scope of NATO. The United States, on the other hand, seeks to advance the Chinese and Indo-Pacific agendas within NATO, but also in such forums as the G7. The Quad structure is also identified in the U.S. 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy as the cornerstone of its actions in the region, and AUKUS was celebrated as the steppingstone for significant progress and integration of defense capabilities.

32 Assemblée Nationale, “[https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/Comptes-Rendus/Cion\\_def/L15cion\\_def2122005\\_compte-Rendu](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/Comptes-Rendus/Cion_def/L15cion_def2122005_compte-Rendu),” Assemblée nationale, accessed June 28, 2022, [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/comptes-rendus/cion\\_def/l15cion\\_def2122005\\_compte-rendu](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/comptes-rendus/cion_def/l15cion_def2122005_compte-rendu).

## Trade

In the realm of trade, France and the EU continue to seek positive engagements with China. It pursues negotiations aimed to set higher standards of transparency, fairness, and reliability for European firms wishing to invest in the Chinese market. Although it remains wary of China's predatory tactics, such as the unilateral sanctions imposed on Lithuania or the doubtful security of Huawei's 5G infrastructures, it attempts to pursue common economic projects. In February 2022, the Chinese National Commission for Development and Reform announced a joint 1.7 billion USD investment in sustainable infrastructure in seven African countries, jointly led by the French Development Agency (FDA) and the China Development Bank. The United States is taken aback by these initiatives, as its focus is rather set on preparing contingency plans in the fields of levying tariffs, imposing sanctions, and possibly even anticipating economic decoupling. In several instances, the United States has proven to even be protectionist regarding the EU. The Boeing-Airbus and the Section 232 steel and aluminum tariff disputes have now been settled, but they have shown a weakness in the alliance, recurrently owed to the competitiveness of the trading realm.

## Security

Additionally, the United States, France, and other allies in the region should work to establish clear redlines or rules of engagement for waging security competition in areas such as avoiding incidents at sea or military conflicts. If both sides are clear in their expectations of what could trigger escalation, this would decrease the likelihood of potential war. This is even more pertinent as all three states are nuclear powers. Defining redlines is vital in preventing nuclear escalation.<sup>33</sup> Redlines decrease the risk of misunderstandings or accidental escalation in both nuclear or conventional war or conflict. In hand with defining these lines, the United States and France must maintain a strong military presence and "formidable conventional forces" in the Indo-Pacific to convince China they cannot achieve a quick and decisive win and deter them from going to war.<sup>34</sup>

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33 John J. Mearsheimer, "The Inevitable Rivalry," November 16, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-10-19/inevitable-rivalry-cold-war>.

34 Ibid.

## Consultations toward Pareto

As is the case in every disagreement, the greatest deal of nefarious consequences can be avoided by open, candid, and upstream consultations. In fact, constructive exchanges and negotiations will generally work their way toward pareto efficiency, increasing the common value far beyond what was initially anticipated. Whether in the field of the power politics or in competitive trade relationships, the United States, France, and the EU should systematically maintain effective channels of communication, refraining from implementing any bilateral or regional action without prior consultations. The latter can be conducted openly through the existing diplomatic, trade, and military channels but can also be usefully delegated to the existing intelligence dialogs. These discreet forums allow for greater flexibility, jointly managing the process, stakeholders, desired end-state, and each side's public opinions. They can also allow the constructive exchange of intelligence and preemptive planning of joint responses on delicate issues, as with outspoken criticism of China's stance regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

## Information and Intelligence

Finally, great powers must also have soft power to gain recognition in the international community. They must create an “associated commonality premised upon shared values, principles, and interests. [...] Such groupings are also innately cross-pollinating and interdependent in that ‘international structures exist only through the reciprocal interactions of actors employing constitutive rules and social practices.’ As such, great powers must be recognized, accepted, validated, and effectively enshrined by others.”<sup>35</sup> Just as China is dominating the information space and using it to spread their influence globally, the United States, France, and the EU must do the same. In today's environment, where information can span the globe within seconds, and the public heavily relies on the internet and social media to obtain facts, China has masterfully employed their own information operations and continues to grow this capability.

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35 Ogden, *China and India*.

The United States, France, and EU have not had a very prominent footprint in the information domain to create a narrative of their own, especially on social media, whereas China's use of coercion and the spread of disinformation in their influence operations is an increasing problem in countries in the Indo-Pacific like Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, but also in Europe.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, economic actions and strategy also influence the external world's view of a country. "Great powers stand to gain the most from these recognition-based interplays, and thus economic strength presages international behaviors based upon often mutually beneficial and transactional interactions. This interlinkage is simultaneously fiscal and ideational in nature, as international trade reflects the dominant consensus and values—created via historical state-to-state interaction and experience—regarding how such great powers function, and these are presently based upon globalized, liberal, free-market economics."<sup>37</sup>

China has become an economic powerhouse, intertwining themselves into the global economy and pushing the idea that they are attempting to bring other nations with them on this economic incline in their "Community for Common Destiny," on the other hand, the same effect can occur to China's detriment if their coercive intent and actions are made transparent. It is critical for allied countries like the United States and France to consult in setting the factual narrative. Information and intelligence sharing between France, the United States, and other Quad countries must occur more frequently to make this happen.<sup>38</sup> The United States and France should not only share information and intelligence, they should also work to increase international awareness of China's coercive actions and the long-term effects, their hardline authoritarian treatment of their people, and human rights violations, while highlighting the combined views of each country, along with other allies' efforts, to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific and promoting regional nations' economic and diplomatic efforts.

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36 Garima Mohan, "Europe in the Indo-Pacific: A Case for More Coordination with Quad Countries," The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 14 January 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/europe-indo-pacific-case-more-coordination-quad-countries>.

37 Ogden, *China and India*.

38 Garima Mohan, "Europe in the Indo-Pacific: A Case for More Coordination with Quad Countries," The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 14 January 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/europe-indo-pacific-case-more-coordination-quad-countries>.



# Conclusion

As China's development grows from assertive to coercive to predatory, the Indo-Pacific policies of the United States, France, and the EU have been increasingly bridged and convergent. The current security landscape in Europe and the direct threat posed by Russia to NATO will further narrow many preexisting gaps in the transatlantic relationship. If semantics can convey a sense of deep unity, then the strategic perspectives on China in the United States and France are very similar. Indeed, according to Secretary Blinken, "the United States' relationship with China will be competitive where it should be, collaborative where it can be, and adversarial where it must be."<sup>39</sup> In an almost identical appreciation, France's 2021 Strategic Review sees China as "a systemic rival for the EU, while remaining an economic competitor and sometimes an important diplomatic partner."<sup>40</sup> Now more than ever, the transatlantic relationship must ensure that collaboration, coordination, and consultation be systematically implemented for an efficient and coherent common approach of this paramount challenge in this critical Indo-Pacific region. After all, when joining the Continental Army back in 1777, the French Marquis de Lafayette had already expressed that "My heart has always been truly convinced that in serving the cause of America, I am fighting for the interests of France."

39 "Remarks at the Top of Their Meeting—March 18, 2021," U.S. Consulate General Hong Kong & Macau, March 19, 2021, <https://hk.usconsulate.gov/n-2021031801/>.

40 "Strategic Update 2021," Ministère Des Armées, [https://cd-geneve.delegfrance.org/IMG/pdf/strategic\\_review\\_2021-2.pdf?2347/25054c0844e37a7fbc1337955a45eb9ac85dea0b](https://cd-geneve.delegfrance.org/IMG/pdf/strategic_review_2021-2.pdf?2347/25054c0844e37a7fbc1337955a45eb9ac85dea0b).



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